This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

843.5
D891nc
v.21

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE leading events of the last years of the long and disastrous reign of Louis XV. are described in these volumes with the author's accustomed accuracy and fulness of detail. During those years the unhappy kingdom of France seems to have taken its longest strides towards the end which keen observers had long seen to be inevitable.

In "Olympe de Clèves" we have seen the king, young, handsome, and flattered, hesitating on the threshold of the career of debauchery into which his intriguing courtiers, with the assent if not the co-operation of the all-powerful minister and former preceptor, Fleury, were striving to force him for their own selfish ends. In these Memoirs of Balsamo, we are shown the deplorable close of that career half a century later. During that half-century — the "period of the [illegible]lence of the Monarchy," it has been called [illegible]sieur Henri Martin — the people of Fran[illegible]g beneath the weight of extortion and [illegible]ad seen

"Sleep! It is my Will!"

THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

JOSEPH BALSAMO

Being Part of

THE MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN

Volume One

The Marie Antoinette Romances

McCLURE BOOK CO.
NEW YORK

informed his master that the woman who had been brought to his notice was unmarried, and untitled, and he thought it his duty to call the king's attention to the compromising results of any further acquaintance with her. The king stopped him short, told him to arrange a marriage for her at once, and, when she was married, to bring her to Compiègne." (De Goncourt.)

It is probable that Richelieu, the ever young, whom we have seen in the "Chevalier d'Harmental" and the "Regent's Daughter," in the far-off days of the regency while the king was yet in his cradle, already a past master in gallantry, and adding zest to his amatory pursuits by playing the part of Harlequin in the burlesque called the "Conspiracy of Cellamare," and again, in "Olympe de Clèves," with diplomatic honors thick upon him, devoting his energies to the corruption of his youthful sovereign, — it is probable, we say, that Richelieu was instrumental in bringing Mademoiselle Lange to the king's notice. Throughout the reign of Louis XV. this mock-conspirator, mock-soldier, and mock-statesman, who never appeared in his true colors except as a libertine and dabbler in petty intrigues, was always at the ear of the king, pandering to the tastes which he had done more than any other to form, and fawning upon the favorite of the day,

her subservient slave, — the king's evil genius, in very truth.

The picture of the cynical, heartless old rake drawn by Dumas is one of the best of the many admirable ones presented in these pages.

To return to the new favorite. Comte Jean du Barry had a convenient brother, Guillaume, at Toulouse, who readily consented to a marriage which required him to make no sacrifice of his liberty, and provided a handsome allowance for his complaisance. A false registry of the bride's baptism was manufactured, in which her birth was put back three years to 1746, and she was represented to have been born in wedlock of Anne Béçu, by her husband, one Jean Jacques Gomard de Vaubernier. The banns were published, the marriage ceremony was performed, the groom returned to Toulouse, and the bride went at once to Versailles, where she was installed in the apartments lately occupied by the king's daughter, Madame Adelaide.

Nothing need be added to Dumas's masterly delineation of Madame du Barry's character and conduct. There were very few among the great ladies of the court whose horror at the spectacle of a woman picked up from the street to be placed over all their heads did not soon yield to the necessity of being well with her. She brought

to Versailles the manners and the slang of the localities in which her life had been passed; but it is only fair to say that she showed such marvellous power to adapt herself to her new surroundings that it may safely be assumed that her lapses into the slang of the brothel were intentional, because she found that they amused the king. De Goncourt relates that a continuous run of ill-luck at the card-table drew from her the ejaculation, "*Ah! je suis frite!*" (I am fried.) "We are bound to believe you, Madame," replied an ill-natured wit, gathering in her stakes, "for you certainly ought to know." This by way of allusion to the profession of her mother, who was cook to a celebrated courtesan.

It is difficult to give any idea of the sums squandered by Madame du Barry during her reign, except by copious extracts from the voluminous documents detailing those sums which are deposited in the "Bibliothèque Nationale." While she had not the same longing for acquisitions of real property which characterized Madame de Pompadour, she more than made up for it by her purchases of dresses and jewelry, pictures, sculpture, and the like, the total of which amounted to many hundreds of millions of francs. Few queens, indeed, have ever been able to boast of such a collection of

jewels as those which were stolen from the favorite on the 10th of January, 1791, — a theft which led to her four voyages to England, and the consequent accusations of emigration and of secret missions to the foes of the Republic.

There is in the "Bibliothèque Nationale" a manuscript journal, written by one Hardy, a Parisian of the middle class, called "Journal des évènements tels qu'ils parviennent à ma connaissance" (Journal of such facts as have come to my knowledge). The following is one of the many entertaining bits of gossip to be found therein. He says that a clerical friend of his was dining out on the 1st of February, 1769, and was requested by a brother of the cloth to drink "to the presentation." Hardy's friend failed to understand what he meant, and asked if he referred to the Presentation of our Lord at the Temple, which was to be commemorated the following day. "No," said the priest who proposed the toast, "I refer to that which will take place to-day, if it did not come off yesterday — the presentation of the new Esther, who is to supersede Haman, and rescue the people of Israel from captivity." The new Esther was Madame du Barry, and Haman, the Duc de Choiseul, in this allegory.

Indeed, the breathless interest excited by this important function, which gave to the mere mistress

the more stable character of favorite *en titre*, can hardly be exaggerated. "Du Barry had unearthed a Comtesse de Béarn," says De Goncourt, "the widow of a Perigord gentleman, who had left her in very necessitous circumstances, with five children on her hands, and a venerable lawsuit against the Saluces family. He obtained for her an allowance which made it possible for her to appear at Court in garb suited to her position, and procured a judgment favorable to her in her lawsuit, thereby making sure of a sponsor." Even then, however, the function was delayed on one pretext or another: "the Comtesse de Béarn, dreading the effect of her complaisance upon her future, at one time pretended that she had sprained her ankle, and obstinately kept to her sofa for some days;" and it was not until the 21st of April, 1769, that the long-looked-for presentation took place. The delay which occurred at the last moment is historical; it was caused by the delinquency of a hair-dresser.

Choiseul, the bosom friend and confident of Madame de Pompadour, could have been influenced by no virtuous scruples in refusing to live on terms of friendship with Madame du Barry. He trusted too much to his established position, and to the need which the king had of him, and rejected the innumerable advances which were made to him

on the part of the favorite, of whom it must be said that politics was as uncongenial a field of activity to her as it was a congenial one to Madame de Pompadour. She desired to be friendly to the Minister, and it was his overweening self-confidence which drove her into the opposite faction, and made her the tool of those who were opposed to all that Choiseul represented. A strange sight it was to see the woman of the street put forward by the party of the devotees, — their real object being to reinstate the Jesuits whom Madame de Pompadour had driven out of France. Even the stern ascetic Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, juggled with his conscience to avoid offending the favorite when Louis was on his death-bed.

Choiseul, on the other hand, was the representative of the philosophers, the obstreperous Parliament, and the Jansenists. In his exile at Chanteloupe he was visited by vast numbers of his adherents, and the greatest and noblest names in the kingdom were inscribed upon the pillars there. "People were not more virtuous," says Saint Amand, "but opposition was fashionable."

It may be said of Marie Antoinette, as of Choiseul, that the enmity between herself and the favorite was not the fault of the latter. It would not perhaps be surprising that the daughter of the

Cæsars should have disdained the lowly-born courtesan, were it not that in so doing she was running directly counter to the wishes and commands of her mother, the politic Maria Theresa. The correspondence of the Empress with Mercy-Argenteau, her representative at the French Court, is copiously cited by Saint Amand (Les Dernières Années de Louis XV.). It is filled with emphatic expressions of the necessity of her daughter's bowing to circumstances, and showing her respect for the king by courteous treatment of *those whom he loves.*

It is, perhaps, needless to say that "Chon" is a very real personage. She was Mademoiselle Claire du Barry, sister of Comte Jean; she was a great favorite of her sister-in-law, and the guiding spirit of the household.

Zamore, too, the little toy negro, was actually made governor of Luciennes, and received the emoluments pertaining to the governorship of a royal chateau. It is not, however, as governor of Luciennes that he won his most enduring fame, but as the serpent who turned upon his benefactress and rent her asunder.

When Louis XV. was dead of the smallpox, Madame du Barry was exiled; but it was only a short time before Luciennes was restored to her by the good-natured successor of her royal lover, and

there she lived until the Revolution, during the last years of tranquillity the very dearly loved mistress of the Duc de Cossé-Brissac. In 1791 her jewels were stolen, and she unwisely called public attention to the fact of her great wealth by offering a reward of two thousand louis for their recovery. The thieves were arrested in England, and she was compelled to make four journeys across the channel before she was able to recover them. The story of the accusations made against her, as a sequel of those voyages, is too long to be told here. All her servants turned against her, and none more vindictively than Zamore, who had become a zealous republican. On the 8th of December, 1793, she ascended the scaffold, and "looked through the little window of la Guillotine," just fifty-three days after the unhappy queen had lost her life on the same spot. "The death of Madame du Barry cost the conscience of the Terror a quarter of an hour more than that of Marie Antoinette," says De Goncourt. "It took the jury an hour and a quarter to convict in the case of the favorite."

The "affair of La Chalotais," which is mentioned so frequently in connection with the Duc d'Aiguillon, arose out of the latter's incumbency of the office of military commandant of Bretagne, during one of the periodical revolts of the parliament

of that restless province, which he had put down with great severity. The English made a descent upon the coast of Bretagne in 1758; D'Aiguillon defeated them at Saint-Cast, and drove them aboard their ships, but the Bretons claimed that the Duc was not entitled to any credit personally, and accused him of hiding in a mill.

Some one remarked in the presence of Monsieur de la Chalotais that "Monsieur d'Aiguillon covered himself with glory at the battle of Saint-Cast."

"With flour you mean," replied La Chalotais, who was procureur-général of the parliament of Bretagne.

D'Aiguillon never forgave it, and seized the first opportunity to prosecute La Chalotais for an alleged plot to overthrow the monarchy. He was imprisoned, and became at once the idol of the parliament, and eventually D'Aiguillon was replaced by Duc de Duras.

Guiseppe Balsamo, better known to fame as the Count Cagliostro, under which name he appears in the other romances of the Marie Antoinette cycle, was a charlatan of extraordinary ability who made a great stir in various European countries during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In his hands free-masonry, which was then under the ban, became a very powerful weapon, and he was much aided in making dupes by his wife Lorenza Feliciani, a

woman of rare beauty, who was also a member of the masonic fraternity. At one time or another he seems to have claimed to possess most of the powers which are here ascribed to him, and which he attributed to the supernatural connections of his master, Althotas, or Alhotas. His name is known in French history for his relations with the Cardinal de Rohan, and his consequent connection with the wretched affair of the necklace, which is the subject of the second of this series of romances.

It will, perhaps, be more convenient to speak of Marie Antoinette at length, in connection with that episode which occurred after she had become queen, and had begun to develop those traits of character which came to the surface so many times, and wrecked so many apparent opportunities of making peace with the Revolution. In this story we see little of her that is not sweet and lovable. Without the gloomy predictions of Balsamo, she might well shudder at the succession of evil omens which welcomed her to France. The apartment which was prepared for her reception on the island in the Rhine where her Austrian escort delivered her to the representatives of her adopted country, was hung with tapestries representing the legend of Jason, Medea, and Crœsus. For this fact we have

no less an authority than Goethe, who was then a student at Strasbourg; his reflections upon the impropriety of such decoration under the circumstances were no less just than forcible.

The fearful storm which interfered with the celebration at Versailles was fittingly capped by the horrible slaughter in Paris the following night, which is so graphically described by Dumas. The Dauphiness was driving into Paris for the first time to see the illuminations, when she was met by intelligence of the disaster, and drove sadly back to Versailles.

To one who has studied Rousseau in his own "Confessions," the glimpses of the testy, suspicious old *philosophe* are by no means the least attractive portions of the book.

Although this story closes with the death of Louis XV., fifteen years before the taking of the Bastille, the introduction of Marat, the gloomy and repulsive fanatic, and above all his reappearance on the last page, give a distinct forecast of what the future had in store.

LIST OF CHARACTERS.

Period 1770 to 1774.

Louis XV., King of France.

Marie Jeanne de Vaubernier, Comtesse Dubarry, his mistress.

Louis Auguste, Duc de Berry, the Dauphin, afterwards Louis XVI.,
Comte d'Artois,
Comte de Provence,
} grandsons of the King.

Princess Louise de France,
Princess Adélaïde,
Princess Victoire,
Princess Sophie,
} daughters of Louis XV.

Duc de Chartres, afterwards Philippe Égalité, Duc d'Orléans.

Duc de Choiseul, Prime Minister of France.

Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria.

Marie Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria and Dauphiness of France.

Duc de la Vauguyon, tutor of the royal princes.

Comte de Coigny, gentleman-in-waiting to the Dauphin.

The Countess of Langershausen, waiting on Marie Antoinette.

Comte de Stainville, brother-in-law of M. de Choiseul and Governor of Strasbourg.

Cardinal Louis de Rohan.

MARÉCHAL DE RICHELIEU,
DUC D'AIGUILLON, his nephew, M. de Choiseul's successor,
M. DE FRONSAC, Richelieu's son,
PRINCE DE SOUBISE,
MARÉCHAL DE LUXEMBOURG,
PRINCE DE GUÉMÉNÉE,
PRINCE DE CONDÉ,
COMTE DE LA VAUDRAYE,
M. D'ALAMBERT,
M. DE MALESHERBES,
DUC DE LA VRILLIÈRE,
DUC DE TESMES, a hunchback,
} gentlemen of the French Court.

DUCHESSE DE CHOISEUL,
DUCHESSE DE GRAMMONT, M. de Choiseul's sister,
PRINCESSE DE GUÉMÉNÉE,
COMTESSE D'EGMONT, Richelieu's daughter,
MARQUISE DE MIREPOIX,
DUCHESSE D'AYEN,
BARONNE D'ALOGNY,
DUCHESSE DE NOAILLES,
MARQUISE DE SAVIGNY,
MADAME D'EPINAY,
MADAME DE POLASTRON,
} ladies of the French Court.

COMTE DE SARTINES, Lieutenant of Police.
LA FOUINE, his clerk.
M. DE SÉGUIER, Advocate-General.
M. BIGNON, Provost of the Merchants.
M. DE LA CHALOTAIS, Attorney-General.
M. DE PRASLIN, of the Choiseul ministry.
M. DE BERTIN, } of the Aiguillon ministry.
ABBÉ TERRAY, }
M. DE MAUPEOU, Vice-Chancellor.
[illegible]. DE BOYNES, of the Parliament.
[illegible]ONSIEUR RÉMY. Vicar of St. Johns, Strasburg.

BARON JOSEPH BALSAMO, otherwise known as Acharat and Comte de Fenix, afterwards Cagliostro.
LORENZA FELICIANI, his wife.
ALTHOTAS, a philosopher.
EMMANUEL SWEDENBORG,
JOHN PAUL JONES,
LORD FAIRFAX,
SCIEFFORT, a Russian,
XIMENES, a Spaniard,
JOHN CASPER LAVATER,
JEAN PAUL MARAT,
} chiefs of a secret brotherhood.
BARON DE TAVERNEY MAISON ROUGE.
CLAIRE ANDRÉE DE TAVERNEY, his daughter.
CHEVALIER PHILIPPE DE TAVERNEY MAISON ROUGE, Andrée's brother.
NICOLE LEGAY, Andrée's waiting-maid.
GILBERT, a poor youth, in love with Andrée.
LA BRIE, servant of Baron de Taverney.
JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU,
M. DE VOLTAIRE,
M. CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS,
M. DE HOLBACH,
M. DE LA HARPE,
M. DIDEROT,
MARMONTEL,
} writers in the reign of Louis XV.
M. DE JUSSIEU, botanist.
M. BOUCHER, painter.
M. PIGALE, sculptor.
CHEVALIER DE MUY.
M. MIQUE, the King's architect.
MONSIEUR LOUIS, Marie Antoinette's physician.
MONSIEUR BORDEU,
MONSIEUR LA MARTINIÈRE,
} physicians to Louis XV.
ANASTASIE EUPHÉMIE RODOLPHE, Comtesse de Béarn.

MAÎTRE FLAGEOT, her lawyer.
MARGUERITE, his servant.
CHONCHON, sister of Madame Dubarry.
VICOMTE JEAN DUBARRY.
ZAMORE, Comtesse Dubarry's negro page.
MADEMOISELLE SYLVIE, } Comtesse Dubarry's maids.
MADEMOISELLE DORÉE, }
SEBASTIAN, a courier in the service of Madame de Grammont.
M. DE BEAUSIRE, Nicole Legay's lover.
M. LUBIN, court hairdresser.
MADAME LUBIN.
LEBEL, valet to Louis XV.
RAFTÉ, Richelieu's secretary.
M. GRANGE, an intendent.
MAÎTRE NIQUET, a notary.
MAÎTRE GUILDOU, an attorney.
THÉRÈSE, Rousseau's wife.
FRITZ, Balsamo's servant.
MARGUERITE, servant of Andrée de Taverney.
M. LÉONARD, a hairdresser.
COMTOIS, a coachman.
COURTIN, a postilion.
DAME GRIVETTE, Marat's servant.
HAVARD, a patient at the Hôtel Dieu Hospital.
M. GUILLOTIN, M.D.
SIMON, a shoemaker's apprentice.
PITOU, a peasant of VILLERS-COTTERET.
MADELEINE PITOU, his wife.
ANGE PITOU, their son.
ANGÉLIQUE, Pitou's sister.
CAPTAIN OF THE "ADONIS."

MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN

INTRODUCTORY.

I. — MONT TONNERRE.

Near the source of the Selz, on the left bank of the Rhine, some leagues from the imperial city of Worms, there begins a range of mountains, the scattered and rugged summits of which disappear northward like a herd of wild buffaloes vanishing in a mist.

These mountains, which from their lofty summits overlook an almost desert region, and seem but to form an attendant train to one which is their chief, have each a peculiar figure, and each bears a name indicating some tradition connected with it. One is the King's Chair, another the Wild-rose Stone; this the Falcon's Rock, that the Serpent's Crest.

The highest of all, which raises to the clouds its granite top, girt with a crown of ruins, is Mont Tonnerre.

When evening deepens the shadows of the lofty oaks, when the last rays of the sun die away on the peaks of this family of giants, we might imagine that silence descended from these sublime heights to the plain, — that an invisible hand unfolded from their declivities the dark blue veil through which we see the stars, to wrap it over the world, wearied with the toil and the noise of day.

Then waking gives place to sleep, and all the tenants of earth and air repose.

Alone in that silence the little river already mentioned, called by the inhabitants of the country the Selzbach, pursues its mysterious course by the fir-trees on its banks, stopping not by day or night; for it must hurry on to the Rhine, which to it is eternity. The sands of its current are so smooth, its reeds so flexible, its rocks so richly clothed with moss, that not one of its waves murmurs, from Morsheim, where it rises, to Freiwenheim, where it finishes its course.

A little above its source, between Albisheim and Kirchheim-Poland, a road, winding deep between two rugged walls of rock, leads to Danenfels. Beyond Danenfels the road becomes a path, — it narrows, is lost; and the eye seeks in vain anything on which to rest, except the slopes of Mont Tonnerre, whose lightning-blasted summit is hidden by a belt of trees impenetrable to the eye.

In fact, once under those trees, leafy as the oaks of Dodona of old, the traveller may in open day continue his way unseen by any one on the plain below. Were his horse hung with more bells than any mule in Spain, not a sound would be heard; were his trappings of gold and jewels like those of an emperor, not a ray from them would pierce through the foliage, — so powerful is the density of the forest in extinguishing sound, and its darkness in dimming the brightest colors.

Even at the present time, when our highest mountains have become mere observatories for every-day tourists, on whose lips the most fearful of the legends of poetry call up a smile of doubt, — even now this solitude has its terrors; so that only a few miserable-looking houses, outposts of neighboring villages, appear here and there, at a

distance from the magic belt, to show that man is to be found in that region. Their inhabitants are millers who carry their flour to Rockenhausen or Alzey, or shepherds who herd their flocks around the mountain, they and their dogs trembling often to hear some enormous fir-tree fall with age, crashing in the unknown depths of the forest.

All the fireside tales of the country are gloomy, and that path which is lost beyond Danenfels, among the heath and furze of the mountains, has not always, they say, led good Christians to a safe shelter. Perhaps there yet may live one of those country people who has heard his father or his grandfather tell what we are now about to relate.

On the 6th of May, 1770, at that hour when the waters of the great river are tinged with a pale rose-color, — that is to say, when the inhabitants of the Rhinegau see the setting sun sink behind the spire of Strasburg Cathedral, which divides it into two hemispheres of fire, — a man who came from Mayence, having passed through Alzey and Kirchheim-Poland, appeared beyond the village of Danenfels. He followed the path so long as the path was visible ; then, when all trace of it vanished, dismounting from his horse, he fastened its bridle to the first fir-tree of the pathless forest. The animal neighed uneasily, and the woods seemed to start at a sound so unusual.

"Gently, gently, my good Djerid ! We have made twelve leagues, and thou at least hast reached thy journey's end."

The traveller tried to peer into the recesses of the forest, but in vain ; he could see only masses of dark shadows relieved upon shadows yet darker. Turning then to his horse, whose Arab name declared his race and swiftness, he took his head between his hands,

approached his lips to the smoking nostrils of the animal, and said, "Farewell, my good horse! If I do not find thee here again, farewell!"

As he said these words he looked quickly around, as if he feared they might have been overheard, or as if he desired it. The horse shook his silky mane, pawed, and neighed as he would in the desert on the approach of the lion. The traveller nodded his head with a smile which seemed to say, "Thou art not wrong, Djerid; there is danger here."

Then, having decided beforehand, no doubt, not to oppose force against this danger, the unknown adventurer drew from his saddlebow two richly mounted pistols, took out their balls, and sprinkled the powder on the ground. This done, he put them back in their holsters. Then he unbuckled a sword with a steel handle, wrapped the belt of it round it, and put all together under the saddle, so that the pommel of the sword was toward the horse's shoulder. After these formalities the traveller shook the dust from his boots, took off his gloves, felt in his pockets, and having found a pair of small scissors and a penknife with a tortoise-shell handle, he threw first the one and then the other over his shoulder, without looking to see where they fell. That done, he again stroked Djerid, breathed deeply, as if to expand his chest, feeling that his strength was about to be taxed, and sought a pathway among the trees. He found none, and at last entered the forest at a venture.

It is time that we should give our readers some idea of the traveller's appearance, as he is destined to play an important part in our history.

He was a man apparently of thirty to thirty-two years of age, of middle height, but admirably made, and his every movement exhibited a fine combination of strength

and flexibility of limb. He was dressed in a travelling coat of black velvet, with gold buttons, under which appeared an embroidered waistcoat; tight-fitting breeches of leather, and polished boots, on limbs which might have served as a model for a sculptor, completed his costume. His face, which had all the mobility of the Southern types, exhibited a singular combination of shrewdness and force. His eye, which could express every feeling, seemed to read the soul of any one on whom it rested. His complexion, naturally dark, had been rendered darker by exposure to a warmer sun than ours. His mouth, large, but well formed, showed a fine set of teeth, the whiteness of which was heightened by contrast with the darkness of his skin. His foot was long, but finely formed, and his hand small, but sinewy.

Scarcely had he advanced ten steps among the dark fir-trees, when he heard the quick tramp of hoofs in the direction of the place where he had left his horse. His first movement was to turn back, but he stopped himself; however, unable to resist the wish to know the fate of Djerid, he raised himself on tiptoe and glanced through an opening. Djerid had disappeared, guided by an invisible hand which had untied his bridle. A slight frown contracted the brow of the unknown, yet something like a smile curled his chiselled lips. Then he went on his way toward the centre of the forest. For a few steps farther the twilight aided him, then it left him, and in darkness so thick that, seeing no longer where to place his foot, he stopped.

"I got on very well to Danenfels, for from Mayence to Danenfels there is a road," said he aloud; "and from Danenfels to the Dark Heath, because there is a path; and from the Dark Heath hither, though there is neither

road nor path, because I could see where I was going: but now I must stop, — I see nothing."

Scarcely had he pronounced these words, in a dialect half-French, half-Sicilian, when a light appeared about fifty paces from the traveller.

"Thanks," said he; "now as the light moves I shall follow."

The light moved steadily on, with a gliding motion, as we sometimes see a light move over the stage of a theatre. The traveller might have gone about a hundred steps farther, when he thought he felt a breathing at his ear. He started.

"Turn not," said a voice on the right, "or thou art dead!"

"Good!" replied the immovable traveller.

"Speak not," said a voice on the left, "or thou art dead!"

The traveller bowed without speaking.

"But if thou art afraid," said a third voice, which, like that of Hamlet's father, seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, "turn back, — that will declare that thou abandonest thy scheme; and thou shalt be permitted to go."

The traveller made a gesture of dissent with his hand, and went on. The night was so dark and the forest so thick that he could not advance without occasionally stumbling. For about an hour the flame moved on, and he followed without a murmur, and without showing a sign of fear. All at once the light disappeared. The traveller was out of the forest. He raised his eyes, and in the dark sky saw some twinkling stars. He continued to advance in the direction of the place where the light had disappeared, and soon saw arise before him a ruin, the spectre, as it were, of some ancient castle. Next his foot

struck against some of its fragments. Then something cold passed over his temples and sealed up his eyes, and he no longer saw even the shadows. A bandage of wet linen bound his head. This was only what he had expected, no doubt, as he made no effort to remove it. He only silently stretched out his hand, like a blind man imploring a guide. His gesture was understood. A cold, dry, bony hand grasped the fingers of the traveller. He knew that it was the hand of a skeleton; but if that hand had been endowed with sensation, it would have felt that his did not tremble.

Then the traveller felt himself rapidly drawn on for about a hundred paces. Suddenly the hand released its grasp, the bandage fell from his eyes, he stopped: he was on the summit of Mont Tonnerre.

II. — HE WHO IS.

In the midst of a glade formed by larches, bare with age, rose one of those feudal castles which the Crusaders, on their return from the Holy Land, scattered over Europe. The gateways and arches had been finely sculptured, and in their niches formerly were statues; but these lay broken at the foot of the walls, and creeping-plants and wild-flowers now filled their places.

The traveller on opening his eyes found himself before the damp and mossy steps of the principal entrance; on the first of these steps stood the phantom by whose bony hand he had been led thither. A long shroud wrapped it from head to foot, and the eyeless sockets darted flames. Its fleshless hand pointed to the interior of the ruins as the termination of the traveller's journey. This interior was a hall, whose elevation above the ground concealed its

lower part, but on whose broken ceiling flickered a dim and mysterious light.

The traveller bowed in assent. The phantom mounted slowly step by step to the hall and plunged into the ruins. The unknown followed calmly and slowly up the steps which the spectre had trodden, and entered also. With the noise of a clashing wall of brass, the great gate of the portal closed behind him.

At the entrance of a circular hall hung in black and lighted by three lamps, which cast a greenish light, the phantom stopped. The traveller, ten steps farther back, stopped in his turn.

"Open thine eyes!" said the phantom.

"I see!" replied the unknown.

The phantom then drew, with a quick and haughty movement, a two-edged sword from beneath his shroud, and struck it against a column of bronze. A hollow metallic groan responded to its blow.

Then all around the hall arose stone seats, and numerous phantoms, like the first, appeared. Each was armed with a two-edged sword, and each took his place on a seat; and seen by the pale green light of the three lamps, they might have been taken, so cold and motionless were they, for statues on their pedestals. And these human statues came out in strange relief on the black tapestry of the walls.

Some seats were placed in advance of the others, on which sat six spectres who seemed like chiefs; one seat was vacant. He who sat on the middle seat arose.

"Brethren, how many are present?" he asked, turning to the assembly.

"Three hundred," replied the phantoms, with one voice. It thundered through the hall, and died away among the ieral hangings on the walls.

"Three hundred," replied the president, "and each speaks for ten thousand companions! Three hundred swords, which are equal to three millions of poniards!"

Then he turned to the traveller. "What dost thou wish?" he asked.

"To see the light," replied the other.

"The paths which lead to the mountain of fire are rugged and difficult. Fearest thou not?"

"I fear nothing."

"One step forward, and you cannot return. Reflect!"

"I stop not till I reach the goal."

"Wilt thou swear?"

"Dictate the oath!"

The president raised his hand, and with a slow and solemn voice pronounced these words: "In the name of the Crucified Son, swear to break all bonds of nature which unite thee to father, mother, brother, sister, wife, relation, friend, mistress, king, benefactor, and to any being whatever to whom thou hast promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service!"

The traveller with a firm voice repeated these words, and then the president dictated the second part of the oath.

"From this moment thou art free from the pretended oath thou hast taken to thy country and its laws: swear thou to reveal to the new head whom thou acknowledgest all that thou hast seen or done, read or heard, learned or divined, and henceforward to search out and penetrate into that which may not openly present itself to thine eyes."

The president stopped; the unknown repeated the words.

"Honor and respect the *aqua tofana* as a prompt, sure, and necessary means of ridding the world, by death

or idiocy, of those who would degrade truth or tear it from us."

An echo could not have been more exact than the voice of the unknown as he repeated the words of the president.

"Flee from Spain, flee from Naples, flee from every accursed land; flee from the temptation of revealing aught that thou shalt now see and hear! Lightning is not more quick to strike than will be the invisible and inevitable knife, wherever thou mayest be, shouldst thou fail in thy secrecy."

Spite of the threat conveyed in these last words, no trace of emotion was seen on the face of the unknown; he pronounced the end of the oath with a voice as calm as at the beginning.

"And now," continued the president, "put on his forehead the sacred band!"

Two phantoms approached the unknown. He bowed his head. One of them bound round it a crimson ribbon covered with silver characters, placed alternately with the figure of our Lady of Lorette; the other tied it behind, just at the nape of the neck. Then they left his side.

"What wouldst thou ask?" inquired the president.

"Three things."

"Name them!"

"The hand of iron, the sword of fire, the scales of adamant."

"Why the hand of iron?"

"To stifle tyranny."

"Why the sword of fire?"

"To banish the impure from the earth."

"Why the scales of adamant?"

"To weigh the destinies of humanity."

"Art thou ready for the tests?"

"The brave man is ready for everything."

"The tests, the tests!" cried many voices.

"Turn!" said the president.

The unknown obeyed, and found himself face to face with a man pale as death, bound and gagged.

"What seest thou?" asked the president.

"A malefactor or a victim."

"A traitor! One who took the oath as thou hast done, and then revealed the secrets of our order."

"A criminal, then."

"Yes; what penalty has he incurred?"

"Death."

The three hundred phantoms repeated "Death!" and in spite of all his efforts, the condemned was dragged into a darker part of the hall. The traveller saw him struggle with his executioners; he heard his choking voice; a dagger glimmered for an instant; a blow was struck; and a dead and heavy sound announced a body falling on the earthy floor.

"Justice is done!" said the unknown, turning to the ghastly assembly, who from beneath their shrouds had devoured the sight with greedy looks.

"Then," said the president, "thou dost approve what has been done?"

"Yes, if he who has fallen was really guilty."

"Thou wilt drink to the death of every man who, like him, would betray the secrets of the holy society?"

"I will!"

"Whatever be the draught?"

"Whatever be the draught."

"Bring the cup," said the president.

One of the two executioners brought the unknown a red, tepid liquor in a human skull, mounted on a bronze

support. He took this frightful cup, raised it above his head, saying, "I drink to the death of every man who shall betray the secrets of the holy society." Then, bringing it to his lips, he drained it to the last drop, and returned it calmly to him who had presented it.

A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly, and the phantoms seemed to look at each other through their half-opened shrouds.

"Good!" said the president. "The pistol!"

A phantom drew near the president, holding in one hand a pistol, and in the other a ball and a charge of powder. The candidate hardly deigned to turn his eyes in that direction.

"Thou promisest passive obedience to the holy society?"

"Yes."

"Even if this obedience be put to the proof against thyself?"

"He who enters here is no longer his own; he belongs to all."

"Then thou wilt obey whatever order be given thee?"

"I will obey."

"On the instant?"

"On the instant."

"Without hesitation?"

"Without hesitation."

"Take this pistol and load it!"

The unknown took the pistol, put the powder in the barrel, forced it down with a wad, then dropped into the barrel the bullet, which he secured with a second wad, and then primed the weapon. All the dread assembly looked on the operation in a silence broken only by the sighs of the wind among the arches of the ruin.

"The pistol is loaded," said the unknown, coolly.

"Art thou sure?" asked the president.

A smile passed over the lips of the candidate as he drew the ramrod and let it slip down into the barrel of the pistol, from which it projected by about two inches. The president bowed in token of being satisfied. "Yes," said he, "it is loaded, and well loaded."

"What am I to do with it?"

"Cock it."

The unknown cocked the pistol, and its click was distinctly heard in the profound silence which attended the intervals in the dialogue.

"Now put it to thy forehead," said the president.

He obeyed unhesitatingly. The silence seemed to deepen over the assembly, and the lamps to turn pale. These were real phantoms, for not a breath was then heard.

"Fire!" said the president.

The cock was heard to snap, the flint flashed; but the powder in the pan alone took fire, and no report accompanied its quick flame. A shout of admiration burst from every breast, and the president involuntarily extended his hand to the unknown.

But two proofs were not sufficient to satisfy all, and some voices shouted, "The dagger! the dagger!"

"You demand it?" said the president.

"Yes, the dagger; the dagger!" replied the voices.

"Bring the dagger," said the president.

"It is useless," said the unknown, making a disdainful movement with his head.

"Useless!" cried the assembly.

"Yes, useless!" he replied, with a voice which drowned every other; "useless! You only lose time, and it is precious."

"What meanest thou?" asked the president.

"I tell you I know all your secrets, — that these tests

of yours are but child's play, unworthy of men. I tell you that I know the body which lies there is not dead; that I have not drunk blood; that, by a spring, the charge fell into the butt at the moment I cocked the pistol. Such things may frighten cowards. Rise, pretended corpse; thou hast no terrors for the brave."

A terrible shout made the arches ring.

"Thou knowest our mysteries?" said the president. "Thou art, then, one of the illuminated or a traitor!"

"Who art thou?" demanded the three hundred voices; and on the instant twenty swords, in the hands of the nearest phantoms, were pointed, with a motion as precise as if directed by a military signal, at the bosom of the unknown.

He smiled, shook the thick curls of his hair, which, unpowdered, were retained only by the ribbon which had been bound round his head, and said, calmly, "*Ego sum qui sum, — I am he who is.*"

Then he turned his eyes slowly around the living wall which hemmed him in, and gradually sword after sword sank before him.

"Thou hast spoken rashly," said the president. "Doubtless thou knowest not the import of thy words."

The stranger shook his head and smiled. "I have spoken the truth," he said.

"Whence comest thou?"

"I come whence comes the light."

"But we have learned that thou comest from Sweden."

"I might come from Sweden, and yet from the East."

"Then we know thee not. Who art thou?"

"Who am I? Well, I will soon tell you, since you pretend not to understand me; but first I will tell you who you are!"

The phantoms started, and the clang of their swords

was heard as they grasped them in their right hands and raised them to the level of the stranger's breast.

"First," said the stranger, extending his hand toward the president, "thou who believest thyself a god, and who art but the forerunner of one, thou who representest Sweden, I shall name thee, that the rest may know I can also name them. Swedenborg, have not the angels who converse with thee familiarly told thee that he whom thou waitedst for was on the road?"

"They did declare it to me," replied the president, putting aside a fold of his shroud in order to see him better who spoke. In doing this, contrary to all the habits of the association, he showed a white beard and the venerable face of a man of eighty.

"Good!" replied the stranger. "On thy left is the representative of England or of old Caledonia. I greet you, my lord. If the blood of your grandfather flows in your veins, England's extinguished light may be rekindled."

The swords sank; anger gave place to astonishment.

"Ah, captain!" said the unknown, addressing one on the left of the president, "in what port waits thy good ship? A noble frigate, the 'Providence.' Its name augurs well for America."

Then turning toward him on the right, he said: "Look, Prophet of Zurich; thou hast carried physiognomy almost to divination: read the lines on my face, and acknowledge my mission."

He to whom he spoke recoiled.

"Come," said he, turning to another, "descendant of Pelago, we must drive the Moors a second time from Spain, — an easy task if the Castilians yet retain the sword of the Cid!"

The fifth chief remained so still, so motionless, that the

voice of the unknown seemed to have turned him to stone.

"And to me," said the sixth: "hast thou nought to say to me?"

"Aye," replied the traveller, turning on him a look which read his heart, "aye, what Jesus said to Judas, — but not yet."

The chief turned paler than his shroud, and a murmur running through the assembly seemed to demand the cause of this singular accusation.

"Thou forgettest the representative of France," said the president.

"He is not here," replied the stranger, haughtily; "and that thou knowest well, since his seat is vacant. Learn, then, that snares make him smile who sees in darkness, who acts in spite of the elements, and who lives in spite of death."

"Thou art young," replied the president, "and thou speakest as if with divine authority. Reflect! boldness imposes on only the weak or the ignorant."

A disdainful smile played over the lips of the stranger. "You are all weak," he said, "since you have no power over me; you are all ignorant, since you know not who I am: while I, on the contrary, know who you are! Boldness, then, alone might overcome you; but why should one all-powerful so overcome?"

"Give us the proof of your boasted power?" said the president.

"Who convoked you?" asked the unknown, becoming the interrogator.

"The grand assembly."

"And not without a cause hast thou," pointing to the president, "come from Sweden, thou" — and he turned toward each of the five chiefs as he spoke — "from Lon-

don, thou from New York, thou from Zurich, thou from Madrid, thou from Warsaw; and you all," looking round the assembly, "from the four quarters of the earth, to meet in the sanctuary of the dreaded faith."

"No," replied the president, "not without cause; for we came to meet him who has founded in the East a mysterious empire, joining the two hemispheres in a community of faith, and uniting mankind in the bonds of brotherhood."

"Is there any sign by which you shall know him?"

"Yes," said the president; "God has deigned to reveal it to me by the mediation of his angels."

"You alone know that sign?"

"I alone."

"You have revealed it to none?"

"To none."

"Name it."

The president hesitated.

"Name it! the hour is come."

"He will bear on his breast a diamond star, and on it three letters, the signification of which is known only to himself."

"What are those tnree letters?"

"L. P. D."

The stranger rapidly threw open his coat and vest, and on his shirt of fine linen shone like a flaming star the diamond and the three letters formed of rubies.

"HE!" cried the president, in consternation; "can it be HE?"

"He whom the world expects?" said the chiefs, with anxiety.

"The Great Copt?" murmured the three hundred voices.

"Now," cried the stranger, triumphantly, "do you believe me when I say, I am he who is?"

"Yes," said the phantoms, prostrating themselves before him.

"Speak, master," said the president and the five chiefs, "speak; we shall obey."

III. — L. P. D.

There was silence for some moments, during which the unknown seemed to collect his thoughts. Then he began.

"Seigneurs," he said, "you but weary your arms with your swords; lay them aside, and lend an attentive ear, for you have much to learn in the few words which I am about to utter."

All were profoundly attentive.

"The sources of great rivers are sacred, therefore unknown. Like the Nile, the Ganges, the Amazon, I know to what I tend, not whence I come. All that I can reveal is that when the eyes of my spirit first opened to comprehend external things I was in Medina, the holy city, playing in the gardens of the Mufti Salaaym. He was a venerable man, whom I loved as my father, yet he was not my father; for though he looked on me with love, he spoke to me only with respect. Thrice a day he left me, and gave place to another old man, whose name I pronounce with gratitude, yet with fear. He was called Althotas, and him the seven great spirits had taught all that the angels know in order to comprehend God. He was my tutor, my master; he is my friend, — a friend to be venerated indeed, for his age is double that of the most aged among you."

His solemn tone, his majestic deportment, deeply impressed the assembly; they seemed trembling with anxiety to hear more. He continued: —

"When I reached my fifteenth year I was initiated into the mysteries of Nature. I knew botany, not as one of your learned men, who has acquired only the knowledge of the plants of his own corner of the world, — to me were known the sixty thousand families of plants of the whole earth. My master, pressing his hands on my forehead, made a ray of celestial light descend on my soul; then could I perceive beneath the seas the wondrous vegetations which are tossed by the waves, in the giant branches of which are cradled monsters unknown to the eye of man.

"All tongues, living and dead, I knew. I could speak every language spoken from the Dardanelles to the Straits of Magellan. I could read the dark hieroglyphics on those granite books, the Pyramids. From Sanchoniathon to Socrates, from Moses to Jerome, from Zoroaster to Agrippa, all human knowledge was mine.

"Medicine I studied, not only in Hippocrates, in Galen, and in Averrhoes, but in that great teacher Nature. I penetrated the secrets of the Copts and the Druses. I gathered up the seeds of destruction and of happiness. When the simoom or the hurricane swept over my head, I threw to it one of those seeds, which its breath bore on, carrying death or life to whomsoever I had condemned or blessed.

"In the midst of these studies I reached my twentieth year. Then my master sought me one day in a marble grotto, to which I had retired from the heat of the day. His face was at the same moment grave and smiling. He held a little vial in his hand. 'Acharat,' said he, 'I have told thee that nothing is born, nothing dies in the world; that the cradle and the coffin are twins; that man wants only to see into past existences to be equal to the gods, and that when that power shall be acquired by him,

he will be as immortal as they. Behold! I have found the beverage which dispels the darkness, while yet I search for that which will banish death. Acharat, I drank of it yesterday, — see, the vial is not full; drink thou the rest to-day.'

"I had entire confidence in my venerable master, yet my hand trembled as it touched the vial which he offered me, as Adam's might have trembled in touching the apple offered him by Eve.

"'Drink!' said he, smiling.

"I drank.

"Then he placed his hands on my head, as he always did when he would make light penetrate to my soul.

"'Sleep!' said he.

"Immediately I slept, and I dreamed that I was lying on a pile of sandal-wood and aloes. An angel, passing by on the behests of the Highest from the East to the West, touched the pile with the tip of his wing, and it kindled into flame. Yet I, far from being afraid, far from dreading the fire, lay voluptuously in the midst of it, like the phœnix, drawing in new life from the source of all life.

"Then my material frame vanished away; my soul only remained. It preserved the form of my body, but transparent, impalpable; it was lighter than the atmosphere in which we live, and it rose above it. Then, like Pythagoras, who remembered that in a former state he had been at the siege of Troy, I remembered the thirty-two existences through which I had already lived. I saw the centuries pass before me like a train of aged men. I beheld myself under the different names which I had borne from the day of my first birth to that of my last death. You know, brethren — and it is an essential article of our faith — that souls, those countless emanations of the Deity, fill the air, and are formed into numerous hierarchies,

descending from the sublime to the base; and the man who at the moment of his birth inhales one of those pre-existing souls, gives it up at his death, that it may enter on a new course of transformations."

He said this in a tone so expressive of conviction, and his look had something so sublime, that the assembly interrupted him by a murmur of admiration.

"When I awoke," continued the illuminated, "I felt that I was more than man, — that I was almost divine. Then I resolved to dedicate not only my present existence, but all my future ones, to the happiness of man.

"The next day, as if he had guessed my thoughts, Althotas said to me, 'My son, twenty years ago thy mother expired in giving birth to thee. Since that time invincible obstacles have prevented thy illustrious father from revealing himself to thee. We shall travel, we shall meet thy father; he will embrace thee, but thou wilt not know him.'

"Thus in me, as in one of the elect, all was mysterious, — past, present, future.

"I bade adieu to the Mufti Salaaym, who blessed me and loaded me with presents, and we joined a caravan going to Suez.

"Pardon me, Seigneurs, if I give way for a moment to emotion, as I recall that one day a venerable man embraced me: a strange thrill ran through me as I felt his heart beat against mine. He was the Sherif of Mecca, a great and illustrious prince who had seen a hundred battles, and at the raising of his hand three millions of men bent their heads before him. Althotas turned away to hide his feelings, — perhaps not to betray a secret, — and we continued our road.

"We went into the heart of Asia; we ascended the Tigris; we visited Palmyra, Damascus, Smyrna, Constan-

tinople, Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Moscow, Stockholm, Petersburg, New York, Buenos Ayres, the Cape of Good Hope, and Aden; then, being near the point at which we had set out, we proceeded into Abyssinia, descended the Nile, sailed to Rhodes, and, lastly, to Malta. Before landing, a vessel came out to meet us, bringing two knights of the order; they saluted me and embraced Althotas, and conducted us in a sort of triumph to the palace of the Grand Master, Pinto.

"Now, you will ask me, Seigneurs, how it happened that the Mussulman Acharat was received with honor by those who have vowed the extermination of the infidels. Althotas, a Catholic, and himself a knight of Malta, had always spoken to me of one only God, omnipotent, universal, who by the aid of angels, his ministers, made the world a harmonious whole, and to this whole gave the great name of Cosmos. I was, in fact, a theosophist.

"My journeyings ended; but, in truth, all that I had seen had awakened in me no astonishment, because for me there was nothing new under the sun, and in my preceding thirty-two existences I had already visited the cities through which I had lately passed. All that struck me was the changes which had taken place among their inhabitants. I was able to hover over events and watch the progress of man. I saw that all minds tend onward, and that this tendency leads to liberty. I saw that prophets had been raised up from time to time to aid the wavering advances of the human race, and that men, half-blind from their cradle, make but one step toward the light in a century. Centuries are the days of nations.

"'Then, said I to myself, 'so much has not been revealed to me that it should remain buried in my soul. In vain does the mountain conceal its veins of gold, in vain does the ocean hide its pearls; for the persevering miner

penetrates to the bowels of the mountain, the diver descends to the depths of the ocean. But, better than the mountain or the ocean, let me be like the sun, shedding blessings on the whole earth.'

"You understand, then, that it is not to go through some masonic ceremonies I have come from the East. I have come to say to you: Brethren, take the wings and the eyes of the eagle; rise above the world, and cast your eyes over its kingdoms!

"Nations form but one vast body. Men, though born at different periods, in different ranks, arrive all in turn at that goal to reach which they were created. They are continually advancing, though seemingly stationary; and if they appear to retreat a step from time to time, it is but to collect strength for a bound which shall carry them over some obstacle in their way.

"France is the advance-guard of nations. Put a torch in her hand, and though it kindle a wide-spreading flame, that flame will be salutary, for it will enlighten the world.

"The representative of France is not here; it may be that he shrinks from the task imposed on him. Well, then, we must have a man who will shrink from nothing. I will go to France."

"You will go to France?" said the president.

"Yes; the most important post I take myself, — the most perilous work shall be mine."

"You know what is taking place in France, then?" inquired the president.

The stranger smiled. "I know," he said, "for I myself have prepared all. An old king, weak, vicious, yet not so old, not so weak, not so vicious as the monarchy which he represents, sits on the throne of France. He has but few years to live. Events must be prepared to succeed his

death. France is the keystone of the arch; let the six million hands that will be uplifted on a sign from the supreme circle pluck out that stone, and the monarchial edifice will fall! Ay, the day that Europe's most arrogant sovereigns shall hear that there is no longer a king in France, bewildered, they will of themselves rush into the abyss left by the destruction of the throne of Saint Louis!"

Here, he on the right of the president spoke, and his accent announced that he was a Swiss. "Most venerated master, hast thou then calculated all?" he asked.

"All!" replied the Great Copt.

"Your pardon if I say more, — but on our mountains, in our valleys, by our lakes, our words are free as the winds and the waters. Let me say, then, that a great event is now about to occur, and that to it the French monarchy may owe its regeneration. I have seen, great master, a daughter of Maria Theresa travelling in state toward France to unite the blood of seventeen emperors with that of the successor of sixty-one kings; and the people rejoiced blindly, as they do when their chains are slackened or when they bow beneath a gilded yoke. I say, then, for myself and in the name of my brothers that the time is not ripe for action."

All turned to him who so calmly and boldly had spoken to their master.

"Speak on, brother," said the Great Copt; "if thy advice be good, it shall be followed. We are chosen of Heaven, and we may not sacrifice the interests of a world to wounded pride."

The deputy from Switzerland continued, amid deep silence: "My studies have convinced me of one truth, that the physiognomy of men reveals, to the eye which knows how to read it, their virtues and their vices. We may see a composed look or a smile, for these are caused

by muscular movements and are under control; but the great type of character is still imprinted legibly on the countenance, declaring what is going on in the heart. The tiger can caress, can give a kindly look; but his low forehead, his projecting face, his great occiput, declare him tiger still. The dog growls, shows his teeth; but his honest eye, his intelligent face, declare him still the friend of man. God has imprinted on each creature's face its name and nature. I have seen the young girl who is to reign in France: on her forehead I read the pride, the courage, the tenderness of the German maiden. I have seen the young man who is to be her husband: calmness, Christian meekness, and a high regard for the rights of others, characterize him. Now, France, remembering no wrongs and forgetting no benefits, whose Charlemagne, Saint Louis, and Henri IV. have sufficed to redeem the reigns of twenty base and cruel kings; France, who hopes on, despairs never, — will she not adore a young, lovely, kindly queen, a patient, gentle, economical king, after the disastrous reign of Louis XV., — after his public orgies, his mean revenges, his Pompadours and Dubarrys? Will not France bless her youthful sovereigns, who will bring to her as their dowry peace with Europe? Marie Antoinette now crosses the frontier; the altar and the nuptial bed are prepared at Versailles. Is this the time to begin in France your work of regeneration? Pardon me; I have felt compelled to say, most venerated Seigneur, what in the depths of my soul I believe, and what I think it my duty to submit to your infallible wisdom."

At these words he whom the unknown had addressed as the apostle of Zurich bowed as he received the applause of the assembly, and awaited a reply from the Great Copt. He did not wait long, for the latter immediately responded, —

"If you read physiognomy, illustrious brother, I read the future. Marie Antoinette is proud, she will interfere in the coming struggle, and will perish in it; Louis Auguste is mild, he will yield to it, and will perish with her. But each will fall through opposite defects of character. Now they esteem each other; but short will be their love, in a year they will feel mutual contempt. Why, then, deliberate, brethren, to discover whence comes the light? It is revealed to me. I come from the East, led, like the shepherds, by a star which foretells a second regeneration of mankind. To-morrow I begin my work. Give me twenty years for it; that will be enough, if we are united and firm."

"Twenty years?" murmured several voices; "the time is long."

The Great Copt turned to those who thus betrayed impatience. "Yes," said he, "it is long to those who think that a principle is destroyed, as a man is killed, with the dagger of Jacques Clement or the knife of Damiens. Fools! The knife kills the man, but like the pruning-hook it lops a branch that other branches may take its place. In the stead of the murdered king rises up a Louis XIII., a stupid tyrant; a Louis XIV., a cunning despot; a Louis XV., an idol whose path is wet with tears of blood, like the monstrous deities of India, crushing with changeless smile women and children who cast garlands before their chariot-wheels. Ah! you think twenty years too long to efface the name of king from the hearts of thirty millions of men who but lately offered to God their children's lives to purchase that of Louis XV.! Ah! you think it an easy task to make France hate her lilies, which, bright as the stars of heaven, grateful as the odors of flowers, for a thousand years have borne light, charity, victory, to the ends of the world! Try, try, brethren!

I give you, not twenty years, — I give you a century. You are scattered, trembling, unknown each to the others; I alone know all your names; I alone can sum up your divided worth; I alone can unite you in one fraternal chain. I tell you, philosophers, political economists, theorists, that in twenty years those thoughts which you whisper in your families, which you write with uneasy eye in the solitude of your old towers, which you tell one another with the dagger in your hands, that you may strike the traitor who would repeat them in tones louder than your own, — I tell you that these thoughts shall be proclaimed aloud in the streets, printed in the open face of day, spread through Europe by peaceful emissaries or by the bayonets of five hundred thousand soldiers battling for liberty, with your principles inscribed on their standards. You who tremble at the name of the Tower of London, you who shrink at that of the prisons of the Inquisition, hear me, — me, who am about to dare the Bastille! I tell you that we shall see those dreaded prisons in ruins, and your wives and children shall dance on their ashes. But that cannot be until, not the monarch, but the monarchy, is dead; until religious domination is despised; until social inferiority is extinguished; until aristocratic castes and unjust division of lands are no more. I ask twenty years to destroy an old world and make a new one, — twenty years! — twenty seconds of eternity! — and you say it is too long!"

The silence of admiration and of assent followed the words of this dark prophet. It was evident that he had completely won the sympathies of those mysterious depositaries of the European hope. The Great Copt enjoyed for some minutes his triumph; then, feeling that it was complete, he continued: —

"Now, brethren, now that I am going to devote myself

to our cause, to beard the lion in his den, to risk my life for the freedom of mankind, — now, what will you do for that to which you say you are ready to give up life, liberty, and fortune? This is what I am here to demand."

A deeper silence fell on the assembly than when he last ceased to speak; it seemed as if the motionless phantoms around him were absorbed by a fateful thought, which when expressed would shake twenty thrones. The six chiefs conversed for a moment apart, and then returned to the president. The president spoke, —

"In the name of Sweden, I offer for the overthrow of the throne of Vasa the miners who established it, and one hundred thousand crowns."

The Great Copt made an entry in his tablets. Another on the left spoke, —

"I, sent by Scotland and Ireland, can promise nothing from England, our firm opponent; but from poor Scotland, from poor Ireland, I shall bring three thousand men, and three thousand crowns yearly."

The supreme chief wrote that pledge with the others. "And you?" said he, turning to one whose vigorous frame and restless spirit seemed wearied by his phantom robe, and who replied, —

"I represent America, whose stones, whose trees, whose waters, whose every drop of blood are vowed to rebellion. While we have gold we will give it; while we have blood we will shed it: let us but be free first. Though now divided and set apart from one another in diverse communities, we are the links of a gigantic chain, and could some mighty hand join two of those links, the rest would unite of themselves. Begin then, O great master, with us! If thou wouldst rid France of royalty, free us first from the foreign yoke."

"It shall be so," replied the master; "you shall first

be free, and France shall help you. Wait, brother! but I promise thou shalt not wait long."

Then he turned to the Swiss deputy.

"I can promise nothing," he said, "but my own personal contribution. Our republic has been long the ally of the French monarchy, to which it sold its blood at Marignan and Pavia; its sons are faithful, — they will give that for which they have been paid; for the first time, I am ashamed of their fidelity."

"So! But we shall conquer without them and in spite of them. And you, representative of Spain?"

"I am poor; I can offer only three thousand of my brothers, with a contribution of a thousand reals yearly. Our Spaniards are indolent; they sleep on a bed of pain: provided they sleep, they care not."

"Good! And you?" said the Copt to another.

"I represent Russia and Poland. My people are either discontented nobles or wretched serfs doomed to labor without rest and to a premature death. The serf, who owns not even his life, can offer nothing; but three thousand nobles have promised twenty louis d'or each annually."

Then all the representatives in turn declared what those from whom they came would give for the great cause. Some were deputies from small kingdoms, some from large principalities, some from impoverished States; but all declared that they would add something to what had been offered. Their promises were written on the tablets of the Great Copt, and they were bound by an oath to keep them.

"Now," said he, "you have seen and recognized the initials of our watchword. Let it be placed *on* your hearts, and *in* them; for we, the sovereign lord of the circles in the East and in the West, have decreed the

downfall of the lily. Hear it, then, brethren: LILIA PEDIBUS DESTRUE."

Loud was their shout at this explanation of the mysterious letters, — so loud that the gorges of the mountains re-echoed it.

"And now retire," said the master, when silence had succeeded, — "retire by those subterranean passages which lead to the quarries of Mont Tonnerre. Disperse, before the rising of the sun. You shall see me once more, and it will be on the day of our triumph! Go!"

His words were followed by a masonic sign understood only by the six heads of the assembly, so that they remained around him when the rest had disappeared.

"Swedenborg," said he, "thou art truly inspired. God thanks thee by me for thy efforts in his cause. I shall give thee an address to which thou shalt send the promised money to France."

The president bowed, and departed, full of astonishment at that intelligence which had discovered his name.

"I greet thee, Fairfax," continued the master; "thou art worthy of thy great ancestor. Remember me to Washington when next thou writest to him."

Fairfax bowed, and followed Swedenborg.

"Come, Paul Jones," said the Copt, "thou hast well spoken; thou shalt be one of the heroes of America. Let her be ready at the first signal!"

The American, thrilled in every nerve, as if the breath of some divine being had passed over him, retired also.

"And now, as to thee, Lavater," continued the chief, "abjure thy theories; it is the time for action. Study no longer what man is, but what he may be. Go! Woe to thy countrymen if they rise against us; for our people will devour in its wrath as the wrath of God devours."

The trembling Swiss bowed and departed.

"Hear, Ximenes," the Copt continued, addressing the Spaniard, "thou art zealous, but distrustful. Thy country sleeps, but it is because none awakes her. Go! Castile is still the country of the Cid!"

The last of the six was advancing, but the Copt stopped him by a gesture and said: "Scieffort of Russia, before a month thou wilt betray our cause; but in a month thou shalt be no more."

The Russian envoy fell on his knees; but a threatening movement of the master made him rise, and with tottering steps he also departed.

And now this singular man, whom we have introduced as the hero of our drama, left alone, looked around the empty, silent hall, buttoned up his black velvet coat, fixed his hat firmly on his head, touched the spring of the great bronze gate which had closed behind him, and sallied out into the defiles of the mountain, as if he had been long familiar with them. Though he had neither guide nor light, he went on rapidly, as if led by an invisible hand.

Having passed the thick belt of trees, he looked for his horse; and not seeing him, he listened, and soon thought he heard a distant neighing. He whistled with a peculiar modulation, and in a moment Djerid could be seen coming forward like a faithful and obedient dog. The traveller sprang to the saddle, and quickly disappeared in the darkness which spread over the heath extending from Mont Tonnerre to Danenfels.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORM.

EIGHT days after the scene just related, about five in the evening, a carriage with four horses and two postilions left Pont-à-Mousson, a small town between Nancy and Metz. It had taken fresh horses at an inn, in spite of the recommendation of an attentive hostess who was on the look-out for belated travellers, and continued on its road to Paris. Its four horses had scarcely turned the corner of the street when a score of children and half a score of gossips, who had watched their harnessing, returned to their respective dwellings with gestures and exclamations expressive in some of great mirth, in others of great astonishment. This was because nothing like that carriage had for fifty years passed the bridge which good King Stanislaus threw across the Moselle to facilitate the intercourse of his little kingdom with France. We do not except even those curious vehicles of Alsace which bring from Phalsbourg to our fairs two-headed wonders, dancing bears, and the wandering tribes of harlequins and gypsies.

In fact, without being either a child or a curious old gossip, surprise might have arrested one's steps on seeing this primitive machine on four massive wheels roll by with such velocity that every one exclaimed, "What a strange way of travelling post!" As our readers, fortunately for them, did not see it pass, we shall describe it.

First, then, the principal compartment — we say "principal," because in front of it was a smaller compartment — was painted light blue, and bore on its panels a baronial scroll surmounting a J and a B artistically combined. Two windows — large windows, with white muslin curtains — gave it light; only these windows, almost invisible to the profane vulgar, were placed in the forward part of the carriage. A grating covered them, through which one might speak to the occupants of the other compartment.

This rear compartment, which seemed to be the important part of that strange vehicle, and which was about eight feet in length by six in breadth, had no light but from the windows, and no air but from a ventilator on the top; and then, to complete its oddity, a chimney, rising about a foot above the roof, offered to the passers-by the pleasant sight of a light cloud of smoke, lengthening into a bluish trail behind it. At the present day we should only have thought it a new invention, combining the power of steam with that of horses. This would have seemed the more probable since the carriage, preceded, as we have said, by four horses and two postilions, was followed by one horse fastened to it by his bridle. His small head, slender legs, narrow chest, and silky mane and tail showed that he was of Arab race. He was saddled, which indicated that one of the travellers shut up in this Noah's ark sometimes enjoyed the pleasure of riding beside the carriage.

At Pont-à-Mousson the postilion who left had received, besides the pay for the horses, a double gratuity, presented by a white and muscular hand, slipped through the leather curtains of the forward compartment, which shaded it as imperviously as the muslin ones did the rear compartment.

"Many thanks, Monseigneur," said the astonished postilion, quickly taking off his cap and bowing low.

A sonorous voice replied in German (for at Nancy German is still understood, though no longer spoken), "*Schnell! schneller!*" which means "Fast! faster!"

Postilions understand nearly all languages, — above all, when accompanied by the sound of certain metals, of which it is said they are rather fond. So the two new postilions did their utmost to keep to a gallop; but after efforts which did more honor to their arms than to the powers of their horses, wearied out, they fell into a trot, getting on at the rate of two and a half or three leagues an hour. Toward seven o'clock they changed at Saint-Mihiel; the same hand passed through the curtains payment for the last stage, and the same voice uttered a similar injunction. Of course the strange vehicle excited there the same curiosity as at Pont-à-Mousson; and as night was fast approaching, its appearance was still more fantastic.

Beyond Saint-Mihiel there is a steep hill, and travellers must be satisfied to let the horses walk. It took half an hour to proceed a quarter of a league. Reaching the summit, the postilions stopped a moment to breathe their horses, and the travellers in the carriage, by withdrawing the curtains, might have gazed on a wide prospect, which the mists of evening were beginning to obscure.

The weather had been clear and warm until three in the afternoon; toward evening, however, it became oppressive. A great white cloud from the south seemed as if intentionally to follow the carriage, threatening to overtake it before it reached Bar-le-Duc, where the postilions resolved at all risks to pass the night.

The road, shut in between the hill and a rugged declivity, descended to a valley in which was seen the winding Meuse, and was so steep that it was dangerous to allow the horses to do anything but walk, — which prudent plan

the postilions adopted. The cloud advanced; and as it brooded over and almost touched the ground, continually extending its limits by drawing the vapors arising from the soil, so was it observed in ill-boding whiteness to overwhelm the bluish clouds, which seemed to take up their station to windward, like ships preparing for an engagement. Soon, with the rapidity of the flood-tide, it spread, until it hid the last rays of the sun. A dim gray light struggled through upon the scene; and although no breeze swept along, the leaves shivered, and put on the dark tinge which they assume in the deepening twilight succeeding sunset.

Suddenly a flash illumined the cloud, the heavens burst into sheets of flame, and the startled eye might penetrate the immeasurable depths of the firmament. At the same moment the thunder rolled from tree to tree, shaking the earth, and hurrying on the vast cloud like a maddened steed. On went the carriage, sending forth its smoke, now no longer black, as at first, but of a delicate opal-color.

In the mean time the heavens grew darker and darker; but a purple light appeared from the carriage, as if the person within, careless of the storm, had lighted a lamp, and was continuing some work which he had to accomplish. The vehicle was now on a level part of the mountain; and when it was about to begin the descent, a peal of thunder more violent than the first rent the clouds, and the rain fell, at first in large drops, then thick and smarting, like arrows darted from the heavens. The postilions seemed to consult together, and then stopped.

"Well!" cried the voice which had before spoken, but now in excellent French, "what the devil are you doing?"

"We were consulting whether we should go on," replied the postilions.

"I think you ought to ask me, not one another. On with you!"

The postilions obeyed, for there was that in the voice which forbade all thought of disobedience, and the carriage began to descend.

"Good!" said the voice; and the leather curtains, which had been half opened, fell between the traveller and the postilions. But the road had become so slippery from the torrents of rain that the horses stopped of themselves.

"Monsieur," said the leading postilion, "it is impossible to go any farther."

"Why?" asked the voice within.

"Because the horses only slip, — they cannot get on; they will fall."

"How far are we from the next place where we change?"

"A long way, Monsieur, — four leagues."

"Well, postilion, put silver shoes on your horses, and they will get on;" and as he said this the stranger opened the curtain and held out four crowns.

"Many thanks!" said the postilion, receiving them in his broad hand, and slipping them into his great boot.

"The gentleman spoke, I think," said the other postilion, who had heard the sound of money, and did not wish to be excluded from so interesting a conversation.

"Yes, the gentleman says we must push on."

"Have you anything to say against that, my friend?" asked the traveller, in a kind voice, but with a firmness that showed he would brook no contradiction.

"Why, as to myself I have nothing to say; but the horses won't stir."

"What is the use of your spurs, then?"

"I have buried them in the sides of the poor jades; and if it has made them move a step, may Heaven —"

He had not time to finish his oath, for a frightful peal of thunder interrupted him.

"This is no weather for Christians to be out in," said the honest fellow. "See, Monsieur, see! the carriage is going of itself; in five minutes it will go fast enough. *Jésus Dieu!* there we go, in spite of ourselves!"

And, in fact, the heavy machine pressing on the horses, they lost their footing. It then made a progressive movement, and by increase of momentum its velocity was augmented till, with the rapidity of an arrow, it was visibly nearing the edge of a precipice. Now not only the voice of the traveller came forth from the cabriolet, his head was seen thrust out.

"Stupid fellow!" cried he, "will you kill us? To the left! the leaders to the left!"

"Ah, Monsieur, I wish from my heart I saw you on the left," replied the frightened postilion, vainly trying to gather up the reins and recover his control of the horses.

"Joseph!" cried a female voice, now first heard, "Joseph! help! help! O Holy Virgin!"

Indeed, the danger was urgent, terrible, supreme, and well might inspire that invocation to the Mother of God. The carriage, impelled by its own weight, neared the precipice, — already one of the leaders appeared suspended over it; three revolutions of the wheel, and horses, carriage, and postilions would all have been precipitated, crushed and mangled, to its base, when the traveller, springing from the forward compartment to the pole, seized the postilion by the collar, lifted him like a child, flung him two paces from him, leaped into the saddle, and gathering up the reins, called to the second postilion, "To the left, rascal, or I will blow out thy brains!"

The command acted like magic. By an extraordinary effort the postilion gave an impulse to the carriage, brought it to the middle of the road, where it began to roll on rapidly, with a noise that contended with that of the thunder. "Gallop!" cried the traveller, "gallop! If you slacken your speed I will run you through the body, and your horses too!"

The postilion felt that this was no vain menace; he redoubled his efforts, and the carriage descended with frightful speed. As it thus passed in the night, with its fearful noise, its flaming chimney, and its stifled cries from within, it might have been taken for some infernal chariot drawn by phantom horses and pursued by a hurricane.

But if the travellers had escaped from one danger, they met another. The cloud which had hung over the valley was as rapid as the horses. From time to time, as a flash rent the darkness, the traveller raised his head; and then, by its gleam, anxiety, perhaps fear, might have been seen on his face, — which he took no care to conceal, for no one but God could see him. Just as the carriage had reached level ground, and was carried on only by its own impetus, the cloud burst with an awful explosion. A violet flame, changing to green and then to white, wrapped the horses; the hind ones reared, snuffing the sulphurous air; the leaders, as if the ground had given way beneath their feet, fell flat; but almost instantly the horse upon which the postilion was mounted regained his feet, and finding his traces snapped by the shock, he carried off his rider, who disappeared in the darkness, while the carriage, after proceeding ten feet farther, was stopped by encountering the dead body of the lightning-stricken horse. All this was accompanied by piercing shrieks from the woman in the vehicle.

There was a moment of strange confusion, in which no one knew whether he was dead or living. The traveller felt himself all over to assure himself of his own identity. He was safe and sound, but the woman had fainted. Although he suspected this, from the silence which had succeeded to her shrieks, it was not to her that his first cares were directed. Scarcely had he lighted on the ground when he hastened to the back of the vehicle.

There was the beautiful Arabian horse of which we have spoken, — terrified, rigid, with every hair rising as if life were in it. He tugged violently at his fastening, shaking the door to the handle of which he was secured. His eye was fixed, the foam was on his nostrils; but after vain efforts to break away, he had remained, horror-stricken by the tempest; and when his master whistled to him in his usual manner, and put out his hand to caress him, he bounded aside, neighing, as if he did not know him.

"Aye, always that devil of a horse!" muttered a broken voice from the carriage. "Curse him, he has broken my wall!" Then, with double emphasis, this voice cried in Arabic, "Be still, demon!"

"Do not be angry with Djerid, master," said the traveller, loosing the horse, which he now tied to one of the hind wheels, —"he has been frightened, that is all; and indeed one might well have been frightened at less."

Saying this, he opened the carriage-door, let down the step, entered, and closed the door after him.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHOTAS.

The traveller found himself face to face with an old man with gray eyes, a hooked nose, and trembling but busy hands. He was half-buried in a great chair, and turned, with his right hand, the leaves of a manuscript on parchment called "La Chivre del Gabinetto;" in his left he held a silver skimming-dish. His attitude, his occupation, his face, motionless and deeply wrinkled, alive only, as it were, in the eyes and mouth, may seem strange to the reader, but they were certainly very familiar to the traveller, for he scarcely cast a look on the old man, nor on all that surrounded him, and yet it was worth the trouble.

Three walls — so the old man called the sides of the compartment — were covered by shelves filled with books. These walls shut in his chair, his usual and principal seat, while above the books had been planned for his convenience several articles for holding vials, decanters, and boxes, the whole set in wooden cases as earthen and glass ware are secured at sea. He could thus reach anything without assistance; for his chair was on wheels, and with the aid of a spring he could raise or lower it to any height necessary to attain what he wanted.

The room — for so we must call it — was eight feet long, six wide, and six high. Opposite the door was a little furnace, with its shade, bellows, and tongs. At that moment there boiled in a crucible a mixture which sent out

by the chimney the mysterious smoke of which we have spoken, and which excited so much surprise in old and young who saw the carriage pass.

Besides the vials, boxes, books, and papers strewed around, copper pincers were seen, and pieces of charcoal which had been dipped in various liquids ; there was also a large vase half full of water, and from the roof, hung by threads, were bundles of herbs, some apparently gathered the night before, others a hundred years ago. A keen odor pervaded this interior, which in a laboratory less grotesque would have been called a perfume.

As the traveller entered, the old man, wheeling his chair with remarkable ease to the furnace, began skimming the mixture in the crucible with a careful attention that seemed to contain an element of reverence ; then, disturbed by the appearance of the other, he drew over his ears his cap of velvet, once black, from under which a few locks of silver hair peeped out. Then he sharply pulled from beneath one of the wheels of his chair the skirt of his long silk robe, — a robe now nothing but a shapeless, colorless, ragged covering. The old man appeared to be in a very bad humor, and grumbled as he continued skimming his mixture.

" Afraid, — the accursed animal ! Afraid of what ? He has shaken the wall, moved the furnace, and spilled a quart of my elixir in the fire. Acharat, in Heaven's name, get rid of that brute in the first desert we come to ! "

" In the first place," said the other, smiling, " we shall come to no deserts, — we are in France. Secondly, I should not like to leave to his fate a horse worth a thousand louis d'or, or rather a horse above all price ; for he is of the race of Al-Borach."

" A thousand louis d'or ! I will give you them, or

what is equal to them. That horse has cost me more than a million, to say nothing of the days of my life of which he has robbed me."

"What has he done, poor Djerid?"

"What has he done? The elixir was boiling, not a drop escaping, — true, neither Zoroaster nor Paracelsus says that none must escape; but Borri recommends it."

"Well, dear master, in a few moments more the elixir will boil again."

"Boil? See! there is a curse on it, — the fire is going out. Something, I know not what, is falling down the chimney."

"I know what is falling," said the disciple, laughing; "it is water!"

"Water? — water? Then the elixir is ruined; the operation must be begun again, — as if I had time to lose! Heaven and earth," cried the old man, raising his hands in despair, "water! What kind of water, Acharat?"

"Pure water, master, — rain from the sky. Have you not seen that it rained?"

"How should I see anything when I am at my work? Water! You see, Acharat, how this troubles my poor brain! For six months — nay, for a year — I have been asking you for a funnel for my chimney! You never think of anything; yet what have you to do, you who are young? Thanks to your neglect, it is now the rain, now the wind, which ruins all my operations; and yet, by Jupiter, I have no time to lose! You know it, — the day decreed is near; and if I am not ready for that day, — if I have not found the elixir of life, — farewell to the philosopher; farewell to the wise Althotas! My hundredth year begins on the 15th of July at eleven at night, and before that time my elixir must attain perfection."

"But it is going on famously, it seems to me, dear master!"

"Yes, I have made some trials by absorption. My left arm, nearly paralyzed, has regained its power; then, eating, as I do, only once in two or three days, sustaining myself meanwhile by a spoonful of my elixir, imperfect as it is, I have more time. Oh, when I think that I want but one plant, but one leaf of a plant, to perfect my elixir, and that we have perhaps passed by that plant a hundred, five hundred, a thousand times! Perhaps our horses have trodden it, our wheels crushed it, Acharat, — that very plant of which Pliny speaks, and which no sage has yet found again or recognized, for nothing is lost. But stay, Acharat; you must ask its name from Lorenza in one of her trances."

"Fear not, master, I will ask her."

"Meantime," said the philosopher, with a deep sigh, "my elixir remains imperfect, and three times fifteen days will be necessary to reach the point at which I was today. Have a care, Acharat; your loss will be as great as mine the day I lose my life! But what noise is that? Does the carriage move?"

"No, master; it is thunder."

"Thunder?"

"Yes, we have all nearly been killed by a thunderbolt; but my silk coat protected me."

"Now see to what your childish freaks expose me, Acharat! To die by a thunderbolt, to be stupidly killed by an electric fire that I would myself bring down from heaven, if I had time to boil my pot, — this is not only exposing me to accidents which the malice or awkwardness of men bring on us, but to those which come from heaven, and which may be easily prevented."

"Your pardon, master; I do not understand."

"What! did I not explain to you my system of points, — my paper-kite conductor? When I have found my elixir, I shall tell it you again; but now, you see, I have not time."

"And you believe one may master the thunderbolt of heaven?"

"Certainly, — not only master it, but conduct it where he will; and when I have passed my second half-century, when I shall have but calmly to await a third, I shall put a steel bridle on a thunderbolt, and guide it as easily as you do Djerid. Meantime, put a funnel on my chimney, I beg you!"

"I will do so; be calm."

"'I will do so!' — always the future; as if we could both look forward to the future! Oh, I shall never be understood!" cried the philosopher, writhing in his chair, and tossing his arms in despair. "'Be calm!' — he tells me to be calm; and in three months, if I have not completed my elixir, all will be over! But only let me pass my second half-century; only let me recover my youth, the elasticity of my frame, my powers of motion, — I shall then no longer have need of any one; no longer will any one say to me, 'I will do:' I shall then myself say, 'I have done!'"

"Do you hope to say that with regard to our great work?"

"Yes! were I but as sure of — oh, heavens! — discovering the elixir as I am of making the diamond!"

"Then you are sure of that?"

"Certainly, since I have already made some."

"Made some?"

"Yes, look!"

"Where?"

"On your right, in the little glass vase."

The traveller anxiously seized the little crystal cup, to the bottom and sides of which adhered an almost impalpable powder.

"Diamond dust?" cried the young man.

"Yes, diamond dust; but in the middle, — look carefully!"

"Yes, yes! a brilliant of the size of a millet-seed."

"The size is nothing; we shall attain to the union of the dust, and make the grain of millet-seed a grain of hemp-seed, and the grain of hemp-seed a pea. But for God's sake, my dear Acharat, put a funnel on my chimney, and a conductor on the carriage, that the rain may not descend through my chimney, and that the lightning may go and sport itself elsewhere."

"Yes, yes; doubt it not! Be calm!"

"Again, again this eternal 'Be calm!' You make me swear. Youth, mad youth, presumptuous youth!" cried the old man, with a gloomy laugh which showed his toothless gums and seemed to deepen the hollow sockets of his eyes.

"Master," said Acharat, "your fire is going out, your crucible cooling. But what is in the crucible?"

"Look into it."

The young man obeyed, uncovered the crucible, and found in it a bit of vitrified carbon of about the size of a small nut.

"A diamond!" cried he. Then, after a slight examination of it, "Yes, but stained, incomplete, valueless!"

"Because the fire was put out; because there is no funnel on the chimney."

"Let me look at it again, master," said the young man, turning in his hand the diamond, which sometimes shot forth brilliant rays, and sometimes was dull. "Good! Pardon me, and take some food to sustain yourself."

"It is unnecessary; I took my spoonful of elixir two hrs ago."

"You are mistaken, master; it was at six in the morning that you took it."

"Well, and what o'clock is it now?"

"Half-past eight in the evening."

"*Jésus!*" cried the philosopher, clasping his hands, "another day gone, fled, lost! The days are shorter, then? They no longer contain twenty-four hours?"

"If you will not eat, sleep at least for some minutes."

"Well, yes, I will sleep two hours, — yes, just two hours. Look at your watch, and in two hours awake me."

"I promise to do so."

"Dost thou know, dear Acharat," said the old man, in a caressing tone, "when I sleep, I always fear it will be for eternity? In two hours, then, you will wake me, will you not? Do not promise it, swear it!"

"I swear it, master."

"In two hours?"

"In two hours!"

Just then something like the trampling of a horse was heard, and a shout which indicated alarm and surprise.

"What does that mean?" cried the traveller; and hurriedly opening the carriage door, he leaped out.

CHAPTER III.

LORENZA FELICIANI.

We shall now inform the reader what had occurred outside while the philosopher and the traveller were conversing inside the carriage.

At the noise of the thunderbolt, which struck down two of the horses and caused the other two to rear so frightfully, the lady in the cabriolet, as we have said, had fainted. She remained for some minutes motionless; then, as fear alone had caused her to swoon, by slow degrees her consciousness returned.

"Ah, heaven!" she exclaimed, "abandoned here, helpless, with no human creature to take pity on me!"

"Madame," replied a timid voice, "I am here if I can be of any service to you."

At the sound of this voice, which seemed close to her ear, the young lady rose, put her head out between the leather curtains, and found herself face to face with a young man who was standing on the step of the cabriolet.

"It was you who spoke, Monsieur?" said she.

"Yes, Madame," answered the young man.

"And you offered me your services?"

"Yes."

"But first tell me what has happened."

"The thunderbolt, which fell almost on your carriage, broke the traces of the leading horses, and one of them ran off with the postilion."

The lady looked uneasily around. "And he who rode the hinder horses?" she asked.

"He has just got into the carriage, Madame."

"Has he not been injured?"

"Not in the least."

"Are you sure?"

"He leaped from his horse, at least, like a man all safe and sound."

"Heaven be praised!" and the young lady breathed more freely. "But who are you, Monsieur, who are here so opportunely to offer me assistance?"

"Madame, overtaken by the storm, I was down in that hollow which is merely the entrance to a quarry, when all at once I heard a carriage coming with alarming speed. I at first supposed the horses had run off, but soon saw that they were managed by a powerful hand. Then the thunderbolt fell with a tremendous explosion, and I thought for an instant that all was over with me. Indeed, on recovering, all that I have related seemed but a dream."

"Then you are not sure that the gentleman entered the carriage?"

"Oh, yes, Madame! I had quite recovered, and distinctly saw him enter."

"Make yourself certain, I entreat you, that he is in the carriage."

"But how?"

"Listen; if he be there, you will hear two voices."

The young man jumped down from the step, approached the door of the principal compartment, and listened.

"Yes, Madame," said he, returning to her, "he is there."

The young lady by a movement of her head seemed to say, "It is well;" but she remained for some time as if plunged in a deep revery.

During this time the young man had leisure to examine her appearance. She was about twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, — a brunette in complexion, but of that rich brown which is more beautiful than the most delicate tint of the rose; her fine blue eyes raised to heaven, from which she seemed to ask counsel, shone like two stars, and her black hair, which she wore without powder, notwithstanding the fashion of the day, fell in jetty curls on her neck. All at once she roused herself, as if she had decided on her course.

"Monsieur," said she, "where are we now?"

"On the road from Strasburg to Paris, Madame."

"On what part of the road?"

"Two leagues from Pierrefitte."

"What is Pierrefitte?"

"A village."

"And after Pierrefitte, what is the next stage?"

"Bar-le-Duc."

"Is it a town?"

"Yes, Madame."

"A large one?"

"About four or five thousand inhabitants."

"Is there any cross-road by which one could get more directly to Bar-le-Duc?"

"No, Madame, — at least I know of none."

"*Peccato!*" murmured the lady, falling back in the cabriolet.

The young man waited, expecting to be questioned further; but as she kept silence, he moved a step or two away. This roused her, and leaning out again, she called hurriedly, "Monsieur!"

The young man returned. "I am here, Madame," said he, approaching her.

"One question, if you please."

"Speak, Madame."

"There was a horse behind the carriage?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Is he there still?"

"No, Madame; the person who got into the carriage untied him and fastened him to the wheel."

"Nothing, then, has injured the horse?"

"I think not."

"He is a valuable animal, and I should like to be sure that he is safe; but how can I reach him through this mud?"

"I can bring the horse here," said the young man.

"Oh, yes! do so, I pray; I shall be forever grateful to you."

The young man approached the horse, who tossed his head and neighed.

"Do not be afraid," said the female; "he is as gentle as a lamb;" then in a low voice she murmured, "Djerid, Djerid!"

The animal evidently knew the voice to be that of his mistress, for he snorted, and stretched out his intelligent head toward the cabriolet. During this time the young man was untying him; but the horse no sooner felt his bridle in unpractised hands than with one bound he was free, and twenty paces from the carriage.

"Djerid," repeated the young woman in her most caressing tones, "Djerid, here, here!"

The Arabian tossed his head, snuffed the air, and came toward the cabriolet, pawing as if in time to some musical air.

The lady leaned out. "Come, Djerid, come!" said she.

And the obedient animal advanced toward the hand which she held out to caress him. Then with her slender hand she seized him by the mane, and sprang as

lightly into the saddle as the goblin in the German ballads who leaps behind unwary travellers and holds on by their belts.

The young man hurried toward her, but she waved him off imperiously.

"Hearken!" said she; "though young, or rather because you are young, you ought to be humane. Do not oppose my flight. I leave a man whom I love; but my religion is still dearer to me. That man will destroy my soul if I stay with him longer; he is an atheist and a necromancer. God has warned him by his thunders; may he profit by the warning! Tell him what I have said, and receive my blessing for what you have done for me. Farewell!"

At that word, light as a vapor, she disappeared, borne away by the aerial Djerid. The young man, seeing her flee, could not prevent a cry of astonishment escaping his lips. It was this cry which startled the traveller in the carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

GILBERT.

THE cry had, as we have said, roused the traveller. He leaped out, shut the door carefully after him, and looked uneasily around.

The first object which he beheld was the young man standing there in alarm. The lightning, which flashed incessantly, enabled him to examine him from head to foot, — a practice which seemed habitual with the traveller when any unknown person or thing met his eye. He was a youth sixteen or seventeen years old, of small size, thin and muscular. His black eyes, which he fixed boldly on any object which attracted his attention, wanted mildness, but had a certain kind of beauty; his nose, small and turned up, his thin lip and projecting cheek-bones, betokened cunning and circumspection; and the strong curve of his chin announced firmness.

"Is it you who shouted just now?" asked the traveller.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And why did you shout?"

"Because —" He stopped short, hesitating.

"Because?" repeated the traveller.

"Monsieur, there was a lady in the cabriolet."

"Yes!"

And the eyes of Balsamo were turned toward the carriage as if they could have penetrated its sides.

"There was a horse tied to the wheel."

"Yes; where the devil is he?"

"Monsieur, the lady has fled on the horse."

The traveller, without uttering a word, sprang to the cabriolet and drew the curtains; a flash of lightning showed him it was empty.

"Blood of Christ!" shouted he, with a roar like the rolling of thunder, which served as its accompaniment. Then he looked round, as if for some means of pursuit, but saw immediately that there were none.

"To try to overtake Djerid," he muttered, "with a common horse would be to hunt the gazelle with the tortoise; but I shall know where she is, unless —"

He felt hurriedly in the pocket of his vest, drew from it a little case, opened it, and took out of a folded paper a curl of black hair. At the sight of it the traveller's face lost its anxious expression, and his manner became calm, — at least in appearance.

"Well," said he, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "well, and did she say anything to you on leaving?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"What did she say?"

"That she left you, not through hatred, but fear; that she is a good Christian, while you, on the contrary —" He hesitated.

"While I, on the contrary —" repeated the traveller.

"I know not if I ought to tell you."

"*Pardieu!* tell me."

"While you, on the contrary, are an atheist and an infidel; that God has given you a last warning by the storm; that she understood that warning, and conjures you not to be deaf to it."

A smile of contempt curled the lip of the traveller. "And this was all she said?"

"Yes, this was all."

"Well, let us speak of something else;" and all trace of disquietude passed away from the traveller's countenance. The young man remarked all these emotions reflected on his face with a curiosity indicating no deficiency on his side of powers of observation.

"And now," said the traveller, "what is your name, my young friend?"

"Gilbert, Monsieur."

"Gilbert! — that is merely a baptismal name."

"It is the name of my family."

"Well, my dear Gilbert, Providence has sent you to my aid."

"I shall be happy if I can oblige you, Monsieur."

"Thank you. At your age one is obliging for the mere pleasure of the thing; but what I am going to ask is only a trifle, — merely if you can direct me to a shelter for the night."

"Why, in the first place, there is that rock under which I took refuge from the storm."

"Yes," said the traveller; "but I should like something more like a house, where I could have a good supper and a good bed."

"That would be very difficult to find."

"Are we then so far from the next village?"

"From Pierrefitte?"

"It is called Pierrefitte, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur; it is about a league and a half distant."

"A league and a half in this darkness, in this weather, with only these two horses, would be a two hours' journey. Think again, my friend; is there not some habitation in this neighborhood?"

"There is the château of Taverney, about three hundred paces from here."

"Well, then —"

"What, Monsieur!" and the young man opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Why did you not say so at once?"

"The château of Taverney is not a hotel."

"Is it inhabited?"

"Certainly."

"By whom?"

"Why, by the Baron de Taverney."

"What is this Baron de Taverney?"

"He is the father of Mademoiselle Andrée, Monsieur."

"I am very glad to know it," said the traveller, smiling; "but I mean what sort of a man is he?"

"An old nobleman, Monsieur, of sixty or sixty-five years of age; he once was rich, they say."

"Ay, and poor now! — that is the history of all those old barons. Well, show me the way to this baron's abode."

"To the Baron de Taverney's?" he asked, in alarm.

"Then you refuse?"

"No, Monsieur; but —"

"Well?"

"He will not receive you."

"He will not receive a gentleman in need of shelter? Is he a bear, then, your baron?"

"Indeed!" said the young man, in a tone which said plainly, "Not much unlike one."

"No matter," said the traveller; "I'll run the risk."

"I do not advise it," replied Gilbert.

"Bah!" said the traveller, "bear as he is, he won't eat me!"

"No, but he may shut the door in your face."

"Then I'll break it open; so, if you refuse to be my guide —"

"I don't refuse, Monsieur."

"Show me the way, then."

"Willingly, Monsieur."

The traveller entered the cabriolet and brought from it a little lantern. The young man hoped, as it was not lighted, that he would be obliged to open the carriage, and that then its interior would be disclosed. But the traveller did nothing of the kind; he put the lantern into Gilbert's hand.

"What shall I do with it, Monsieur?"

"You will light the way with it while I lead the horses."

"But it is not lighted."

"I am going to light it."

"Oh! you have a fire in the carriage?"

"And in my pocket," replied the traveller.

"But in this rain the tinder won't kindle."

"Open the lantern," said the traveller, smiling.

Gilbert obeyed.

"Hold your hat over my hands."

Gilbert obeyed, regarding with curiosity what followed; for he knew no other means of procuring a light than with a flint and tinder.

The traveller took from his pocket a very small silver case, and drew from it a match, which he rubbed in some sort of inflammable paste; it kindled instantly, with a slight crackling.

Gilbert started; the traveller smiled at his surprise, which was natural enough at that time, when phosphorus was known only to a few chemists, who kept the secret for their own advantage. The candle in the lantern being lighted by the match, he put up the little case. The young man followed his movements with greedy

it was evident that he would have given a great

for such a treasure.

"Now that we have light, will you guide me?" asked the traveller.

"Come, Monsieur;" and Gilbert advanced, while his companion, taking the horse by the bit, dragged him after. The weather was now not so bad, the rain had ceased, and the thunder was heard muttering at a distance. The traveller seemed to wish for more conversation.

"You know this baron, then, my good fellow?"

"Certainly, Monsieur, since I have lived in his house from my infancy."

"A relative?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Your guardian?"

"No."

"Your master?"

The young man started and colored with anger at the word "master." "I am not a servant, Monsieur," said he.

"Well, but you are surely something or other?"

"I am the son of an old tenant of the baron's; my mother nursed Mademoiselle Andrée."

"I understand; you live in the house as the young lady's foster-brother, — for I presume she is young."

"She is sixteen years old, Monsieur."

It will be noticed that of the traveller's two questions, Gilbert avoided any reply to the one which concerned himself. The traveller seemed to observe this, and gave his interrogations another turn.

"How did you happen to be travelling during such weather?"

"I was not travelling, Monsieur; I was under a rock near the road."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was reading."

"You were reading?"

"Yes."

"What were you reading?"

"'Le Contrat Social,' by Rousseau."

The traveller looked at the young man with surprise.

"Did you get that book in the baron's library?"

"No, Monsieur; I bought it."

"Where? — at Bar-le-Duc?"

"No, Monsieur, — here, from a pedler. They roam this way now and then, and bring us some tolerably good books."

"Who told you 'Le Contrat Social' was a good book?"

"I found that out by reading it, Monsieur."

"Have you read bad books, then, that you know the difference so well?"

"Yes."

"What do you call bad books?"

"Why, 'Le Sofa,' 'Tanzaï,' and 'Néadarme,' and books of that description."

"But where the deuce did you get such books?"

"In the baron's library."

"And how does the baron get new novels in this den of his?"

"They are sent him from Paris."

"So this poor baron spends his money on that sort of trash?"

"No; they are given him."

"Given him? By whom?"

"By one of his friends, a great nobleman."

"A great nobleman! Do you know his name?"

"The Duc de Richelieu."

"What, the old marshal?"

"Yes, the marshal."

"I take it for granted he does not leave such books in Mademoiselle Andrée's way?"

"Indeed, Monsieur, he leaves them in everybody's way."

"Is Mademoiselle Andrée of your opinion," asked the traveller, with a sly smile, "that they are bad?"

"She does not read them, Monsieur," replied Gilbert, dryly.

The traveller was silent for a minute; this character, a singular mixture of shame and boldness, of good and evil, interested him in spite of himself.

"And why did you read those books when you knew they were bad?"

"Because I did not know their character when I began them."

"But you soon found it out?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And nevertheless you continued reading?"

"I continued."

"But why?"

"They taught me things I did not know before."

"And 'Le Contrat Social'?"

"It teaches me things that I have myself discovered."

"What are they?"

"That men are brothers; that societies in which there are serfs or slaves are ill constituted; that one day we shall all be equal."

"Oh, ho!" said the traveller. There was a short silence.

"So, my good fellow," continued the traveller, in a low voice, "you wish to learn?"

"Yes, Monsieur; that is my most ardent wish."

"And what do you wish to learn?"

"Everything."

"For what purpose?"

"To raise myself in the world."

"And how high would you rise?"

Gilbert hesitated. No doubt he had his mind made up on that point; but it was evidently a secret, and he would not reveal it.

"As high as man can rise," he replied.

"Well, have you studied anything?"

"Nothing. How can I study, not being rich, and living at Taverney?"

"Then you know nothing of mathematics?"

"No."

"Nor of natural philosophy?"

"No."

"Nor of chemistry?"

"No; I know only how to read and write. But I shall know all those things."

"When?"

"Some day or other."

"But how?"

"I don't know yet, but I shall know them."

"Strange creature!" muttered the traveller.

"And then—!" murmured Gilbert, speaking to himself.

"Well! then—?"

"Nothing."

They had now proceeded for about a quarter of an hour; the rain had ceased, and the earth sent up those odoriferous exhalations which in spring follow a great storm. Gilbert seemed reflecting; all at once he said, "Monsieur, do you know the cause of storms?"

"Certainly."

"You really do!"

"Yes."

"You know what a tempest is; you know the cause of thunder?"

The traveller smiled. "It is the meeting of two streams of the electric fluid, — one from the clouds, the other from the earth."

Gilbert sighed. "I do not understand that," said he.

Perhaps the traveller would have explained the matter more clearly; but just then a light appeared through the trees.

"Ah! what is that?" asked the stranger.

"It is Taverney."

"We have reached it, then?"

"Yes; this is the gate of the back entrance."

"Open it."

"Oh, Monsieur, the gate of Taverney is not to be opened in that manner!"

"Is it a fortified place, then? Knock."

Gilbert approached the gate and timidly gave one knock.

"*Pardieu!* they will never hear that. Knock loudly!"

Nothing, indeed, indicated that Gilbert's knock had been heard; all was silent.

"You must take the responsibility upon yourself, then, Monsieur," said Gilbert.

"Don't be troubled about that."

Gilbert hesitated no longer; he left the knocker, and pulled a string which made a bell sound so loud one might have heard it a mile off.

"Faith! if your baron does not hear that," said the traveller, "he must be deaf."

"Hark! I hear Mahon barking."

"Mahon? That is no doubt a compliment from your baron to his friend the Duc de Richelieu!"

"I don't know what you mean, Monsieur."

"Mahon was the last place taken by the marshal."

"Alas, Monsieur! I have already told you that I know nothing;" and Gilbert sighed again.

These sighs revealed to the stranger some hidden ambition, some secret cause of pain. A step was heard. "Here is some one at last," said the stranger.

"It is Master la Brie," said Gilbert.

The gate opened; but La Brie, taken by surprise at seeing the stranger and the carriage when he expected no one but Gilbert, would have shut it again.

"Excuse me, my friend," said the traveller, "but I have come here purposely, and you must not shut the door in my face."

"But, Monsieur, I must tell the baron that an unexpected visitor —"

"Believe me, there is no need to tell him. I will run the risk of his looking a little cross at me; but he shall not turn me out, I can tell you, until I am warmed, dried, and fed. They say you have good wine in this part of the country; do you happen to know?"

La Brie, instead of replying, was going to make further resistance; but it was in vain, the traveller pushed in, and Gilbert closed the gate after him, the two horses and carriage being in the avenue. La Brie, seeing himself vanquished, proceeded as quickly as his old limbs would permit toward the house to announce his own defeat, shouting with all his strength, "Nicole Legay, Nicole Legay!"

"Who is this Nicole Legay!" asked the stranger, calmly making his way to the house.

"Nicole Legay, Monsieur?" replied Gilbert, with symptoms of some inward emotion.

"Yes, — she whom Master la Brie is calling!"

"Mademoiselle Andrée's waiting-maid, Monsieur."

In the mean time, in answer to the calls of La Brie, a light appeared under the trees, borne by a beautiful young girl. "What do you want, La Brie? What is all this fuss?" she asked.

"Quick, Nicole," cried the quivering voice of the old man; "run and tell the baron a strange gentleman, overtaken by the storm, is asking hospitality for the night."

Nicole did not wait to be told twice, but flew off toward the château so quickly that in a moment she was out of sight. As to La Brie, having thus satisfied himself that the baron should not be taken by surprise, he stopped and took breath.

The message soon produced an effect. A sharp, commanding voice was heard from the house repeating, with an accent by no means hospitable, "A strange gentleman? Who is he? Gentlemen don't come in that way, without sending up their names!"

"Is it the baron himself?" asked he who was the cause of all the disturbance.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur!" replied the poor, frightened old man; "you hear what he says?"

"He asks my name, I think?"

"Yes. I forgot to ask it, Monsieur."

"Announce the Baron Joseph Balsamo. Our titles being the same, he will perhaps not be so angry."

La Brie, a little emboldened by the rank of the stranger, announced him as he requested.

"Well," grumbled the voice from the house, "since he is there, he must come in. Here, monsieur — this way — this way."

The stranger advanced quickly; but just as he reached the foot of the stone steps leading up to the door, he turned to see whether Gilbert were there or not. Gilbert had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARON DE TAVERNEY.

Although forewarned by Gilbert of the poverty of the Baron de Taverney, the person who had caused himself to be announced as the Baron Joseph Balsamo could not help being surprised at the miserable appearance of the abode called by Gilbert, with emphasis, a château.

The house was built in the form of an oblong square of one story in height, with a square tower at each corner. Its irregular appearance had, however, something pleasing and picturesque, seen by the pale light of the moon, shining out between the huge masses of cloud left by the storm. There were six windows in the low building, and two in each tower, — that is, one window in each of its stories. A broad flight of steps led up to the hall-door, but they were so broken and rugged that they seemed rather a sort of precipice than a staircase.

Such was the dwelling, on the threshold of which the stranger was received by the Baron de Taverney, in his dressing-gown, and holding a candlestick in his hand. The baron was a little old man of from sixty to sixty-five years of age, with a keen eye and a high, retreating forehead. He wore an old wig, which from frequent accidents with the candles on the mantelpiece had lost all the curls which had been spared by the rats. He held in his hand a napkin of very dubious whiteness, which indicated that he had been disturbed when about sitting down to supper. In his malicious countenance, which

slightly resembled that of Voltaire, two expressions struggled for mastery, — politeness required a smile for his guest; vexation changed it to an atrabilious sneer. Thus lighted by the candle in his hand, the flickering of which distorted his features, the Baron de Taverney could not well be called anything but a very ugly nobleman.

"Monsieur," said he, "may I know to what fortunate circumstance I owe the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Simply, Monsieur, to the storm, which frightened my horses and caused them very nearly to destroy my carriage. One of my postilions was thrown from his horse, the other galloped off with his; and I know not what I should have done had I not met a young man who conducted me to your château, assuring me that your hospitality was well known."

The baron raised his light that he might see the unlucky wight who was responsible for that "fortunate circumstance" of which he had just spoken. Balsamo also looked around to ascertain more certainly whether his young guide had disappeared.

"And do you know the name of the young man who pointed out my château?" asked the Baron de Taverney, as if he wanted to return him thanks.

"Gilbert, I think, is his name."

"Ha! Gilbert; I scarcely thought him capable even of that. Ah! he is an idle dog, — a philosopher, you must know, Monsieur!"

The threatening tone in which these epithets were uttered showed that there was little sympathy between the lord and his vassal.

"However, Monsieur," said the baron, after a moment's silence, as expressive as his words, "will you be good enough to enter?"

"Allow me first, sir, to see after my carriage, which contains some very valuable articles."

"La Brie!" cried the baron, "La Brie! get some assistance, and put the gentleman's carriage under the shed in the yard; there are still some laths of a roof there. I can't answer for your horses, however, getting a good feed; but as they are not yours, but the postmaster's, you need not care very much."

"In truth, Monsieur," said the traveller, beginning to get impatient, "I fear that I am giving you quite too much trouble."

"Not at all, Monsieur, not at all, — no trouble to me; but you will be rather poorly lodged, I warn you."

"Monsieur, I assure you I shall be forever grateful — "

"Oh! I allow myself no illusions, Monsieur," said the baron, raising his candle so as to throw its rays in the direction where Balsamo was assisting La Brie to wheel his carriage under the shed, and elevating his voice in proportion as his guest retreated, — "I am under no illusion; Taverney is a dull abode, and especially a poor abode!"

The traveller was too busy to reply; he chose the best-covered part of the shed to shelter the carriage, and having pointed it out to La Brie, slipped a lois-d'or into his hand and returned to the baron. La Brie put the louis in his pocket, supposing it only a crown, and thanking Heaven for his good fortune.

"God forbid I should think so ill of your château as you speak of it!" said Balsamo, bowing to the baron, who, as the only proof of the truth of his assertion, shook his head, and led the guest through a wide, damp antechamber, grumbling as he proceeded, "Oh! all very good; but I know what I am saying, — I know, unfortunately, my own means; and I assure you they are very limited. If you *are a Frenchman,* Monsieur, — but your German accent

shows you are not; and yet your name is Italian: but that is no matter, — if you are a Frenchman, I repeat, the name of Taverney may recall some recollections of splendor; it was once Taverney the rich!"

Balsamo expected a sigh at this conclusion, but there was none. "Philosophy!" thought he.

"This way, this way!" continued the baron, opening the dining-room door. "Holloa, Maître la Brie! wait at supper now as if you were yourself a hundred servants in one!"

La Brie bustled about in obedience to this command.

"I have no servant but this, Monsieur," said Taverney; "he is a very bad one, but I have not the means of getting a better. The fool has been with me twenty years without getting a penny of wages. I feed him about as well as he waits on me. He is an ass, you see!"

Balsamo continued to study this character. "No heart," thought he; "yet perhaps all this is merely affectation."

The baron shut the door of the dining-room; and then as he held his light high above his head, the traveller saw distinctly its size and its furniture. It was a large, low hall, which had formerly been the principal apartment of a small farm-house, raised by its owner to the rank of a château. It was so scantily furnished that at the first glance it appeared empty. Straw chairs with carved backs, some engravings from the battle-pieces of Lebrun, framed in black-varnished wood, and a large oak cupboard dark with age and smoke, were all its ornaments. In the middle stood a little round table on which was a dish of partridges and cabbage. The wine was in a stone jar, and the plate, unpolished, worn, and battered, consisted of three covers, one tankard, and one salt-cellar; but this last article was very massive, exquisitely chased, and looked like a diamond among worthless pebbles.

"There, Monsieur, there!" said the baron, offering a seat to his guest, whose scrutinizing look on all around did not escape him. "Oh! you are looking at my salt-cellar. You admire it. Good taste, — and very polite too; for you fix on the only thing here worth looking at. I assure you, Monsieur, I am particularly obliged. But no, I forgot; I have one other valuable commodity, — my daughter!"

"Mademoiselle Andrée?" said Balsamo.

"Faith, yes! Mademoiselle Andrée!" said the host, surprised that his guest was so well informed. "I shall present you to her. Andrée! Andrée! Come hither, child; don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid, father," answered a sweet and clear voice; and a tall and beautiful girl entered the room, in a manner perfectly unembarrassed, and yet quite free from forwardness.

Joseph Balsamo, though, as we have seen, perfectly master of himself, could not prevent an involuntary bow at sight of that sovereign beauty. Andrée de Taverney seemed indeed sent to adorn and brighten all around her. She had dark auburn hair, of a rather lighter shade at her temples and neck, black eyes, — clear, with dilated pupils, — and a steady and majestic look, like that of an eagle; yet the mildness of that look was inexpressible. Her small mouth, formed like Apollo's bow, was brilliant as coral; her tapering hands were antique in form, as were her arms, and dazzlingly fair. Her figure, flexible and firm, was like that of the statue of some pagan goddess to which a miracle had given life. Her foot might bear a comparison with that of the huntress Diana, and it seemed only by a miracle that it could support the weight of body. Her dress was of the simplest fashion, yet d her so well that it seemed as if one from the

wardrobe of a queen would not have been so elegant or so rich.

All these details were perceived by Balsamo in the first glance as the young lady passed from the door to the table. On his side, the baron had not lost a single impression produced on the mind of his guest by the rare union of perfections in his daughter.

"You were right," whispered Balsamo, turning to his host; "Mademoiselle Andrée is perfection."

"Do not flatter poor Andrée, Monsieur," said the baron, carelessly; "she has just returned home from her convent, and she will believe all you say. Not that I am afraid of her coquetry, — on the contrary, the dear child is not enough of a coquette; but, like a good father, I am cultivating in her that quality which is a woman's best weapon."

Andrée looked down and blushed; although she tried to avoid listening, she could not but overhear her father's strange theory.

"Did they tell Mademoiselle that at the convent?" asked Joseph Balsamo, laughing; "and was that precept part of the instructions of the nuns?"

"Monsieur," replied the baron, "I have my own way of thinking, as you perhaps have already seen."

Balsamo bowed, in token that he assented entirely to the baron's claim.

"No," continued he, "I do not imitate those fathers who say to their daughters, 'Be prudes, be rigid, be blind; think of nothing but honor, delicacy, devotion.' Fools! It is as if the fathers of the knights of old had sent those champions into the lists, after having taken off all their armor, to fight an adversary armed cap-à-pie. *Pardieu!* that is not the way I shall bring up my daughter Andrée, though she be brought up in this miserable den."

Although Balsamo perfectly agreed with the baron as to the propriety of this last epithet, yet he deemed it proper to intimate a polite contradiction.

"Oh! all very well," resumed the old man, replying to the movement of Balsamo's features; "but I know the place, I tell you. Yet, though now so far from the sun of Versailles, my daughter shall know the world which I formerly knew so well myself; and if she enter it, it shall be with an arsenal of weapons forged by my experience and my recollections. But I must confess, Monsieur, the convent has ruined all my plans. My daughter — such things happen only to me — was the first pupil who really practised the precepts there taught, and followed the letter of the Gospel. *Corbleu!* was not that being prettily served?"

"Mademoiselle is an angel," replied Balsamo; "and in truth, Monsieur, what you say does not surprise me."

Andrée bowed her thanks for this compliment, and sat down in obedience to a look from her father.

"Be seated, baron," said the host, "and if you are hungry, eat. What a horrible ragout that fool La Brie has given us!"

"Partridges! Do you call that horrible?" said the guest, smiling. "You slander your supper. Partridges in May! They are, then, from your own estates?"

"My estates! it is long since I had one. My respectable father left me some land, indeed, but it was eaten and digested long enough ago. Oh, Heaven be praised! I have not an inch of ground. That good-for-nothing Gilbert, who can only read and dream, must have stolen a gun, powder, and shot from some one or other; and he kills birds, poaching on the estates of my neighbors. He will be caught and sent to the galleys some day, and cer*tainly I shall not* interfere, — it will be a good riddance;

but Andrée likes game, so I am obliged to overlook Monsieur Gilbert's freaks."

Balsamo watched Andrée's lovely face as this was said, but not a change, not the slightest blush, disturbed it. He was seated at table between her and the baron; and she helped him, without appearing in the least annoyed at the scantiness of the repast, to a portion of the dish procured by Gilbert and cooked by La Brie, and so heartily abused by the baron. During this time poor La Brie, who heard all the eulogiums passed on himself and Gilbert, handed the plates with a deprecating air, which became quite triumphant at each word of praise the guest bestowed on his cookery.

"He has not even salted his abominable ragout!" cried the baron, after he had devoured two wings of a partridge, which his daughter had placed before him on a tempting layer of cabbage. "Andrée, pass the salt-cellar to the Baron Balsamo."

Andrée obeyed, extending her arm with exquisite grace.

"Ah, you are admiring the salt-cellar again!" said the host.

"No, Monsieur, you are wrong this time," replied Balsamo; "I was admiring Mademoiselle's hand."

"Ah! very good indeed, — a perfect Richelieu! But since you have the salt-cellar in your own hand, examine it; it was made for the regent by the goldsmith Lucas. It represents the loves of the satyrs and bacchantes, — a little free, but pretty."

Balsamo saw that the little figures so admirably executed were something worse than free, and he could not but admire the unconsciousness with which Andrée had offered him the salt-cellar. But as if the baron had determined to put to the proof that innocence which carries

with it such a charm, he began to point out in detail the beauties of his favorite piece of plate, in spite of all Balsamo's efforts to change the conversation.

"Come, eat, baron," said Taverney; "for I warn you there is no other dish. Perhaps you are expecting the roast and other removes; if so, great will be your disappointment."

"Pardon me, Monsieur," said Andrée, in her usual calm manner; "but if Nicole has rightly understood me, we shall have another dish. I have given her the receipt for one."

"The receipt! you have given a receipt to your maid! the femme-de-chambre turned cook! There is only one step more, — turn cook yourself, I beg you! Did the Duchesse de Châteauroux or the Marquise de Pompadour ever cook for the king? On the contrary, it was he who dressed omelets for them. *Jour de Dieu!* have I lived to see women cooking in my house? Baron, excuse my daughter, I beseech you."

"But, father, we must eat," said Andrée, quietly. "Well, Legay," added she in a louder tone, "is it done?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle," replied the maid, bringing in a dish of a very tempting odor.

"I know one at least who will not eat of that dish!" said the baron, furious, and breaking his plate as he spoke.

"Perhaps *you* will eat some, Monsieur?" said Andrée, coldly. Then, turning to her father, "You know, Monsieur, we have now only seven plates of that set which my mother left me;" and, so saying, she proceeded to carve the smoking viands which Mademoiselle Legay, the pretty waiting-maid, had just placed on the table.

CHAPTER VI.

ANDRÉE DE TAVERNEY.

THE searching intellect of Balsamo found ample food for study in each detail of the strange and isolated life led by this family in a corner of Lorraine. The salt-cellar alone revealed to him one phase of the baron's character, or rather his character in all its bearings. He called up all his penetration, therefore, as he scrutinized the features of Andrée while she handed him that salt-cellar.

Whether moved by curiosity or by some deeper feeling, Balsamo gazed on Andrée so fixedly that two or three times, in less than ten minutes, the eyes of the young girl met his. At first she bore his look without confusion; but its intensity became by degrees so great that a feverish impatience, which made the blood mount to her cheeks, took possession of her; then feeling that this look had something supernatural in its power, she tried to brave it, and in her turn she gazed at the baron with her large, limpid, dilated eyes. But this time again she was obliged to yield; and filled with the magnetic fluid which flowed in streams from his flaming orbs, her eyelids, weighed down, sank timidly, no longer to be raised but with hesitation.

While this silent struggle went on between the young girl and the mysterious traveller, the baron grumbled, laughed, found fault, and swore like a true country gentleman, and pinched La Brie whenever he was within his reach, feeling that he must vent his spleen on some one.

He was going to do the same to Nicole, when his eyes, for the first time, no doubt, rested on the hands of the young waiting-maid. The baron was an adorer of fine hands; all his youthful follies might be attributed to the power of a fine hand over him.

"Only see," cried he, "what pretty fingers this little rogue has! How the nail tapers! it would bend over the tip, — a great beauty, if washing bottles and cutting wood did not wear down the horn; for it is horn you have at the ends of your fingers, Mademoiselle Nicole."

Not accustomed to compliments from her master, Nicole looked at him with a half-smile, in which there was more astonishment than gratification.

"Yes, yes," said the baron, who read the mind of the young flirt, "turn away, — play the coquette, I beg of you; but I must inform you, my dear guest, that Mademoiselle Nicole Legay, this young lady here present, is not a prude like her mistress, and is not at all afraid of a compliment."

Balsamo turned quickly toward the baron's daughter, and saw an expression of supreme disdain on her handsome features; then thinking it right to adapt his expression to hers, he looked haughtily away, — at which Andrée seemed pleased, and regarded him with less sternness, or rather with less uneasiness, than before.

"Would you think, Monsieur," continued the baron, chucking Nicole under the chin, "would you think that this damsel had been in a convent with my daughter, and is really what one might call 'educated'? Oh! Mademoiselle Nicole would not quit her mistress for a moment. There is a devotedness in her which would greatly delight the philosophers who maintain that these creatures have souls."

"*Monsieur,*" said Andrée, displeased, "it is not de-

votedness which prevents Nicole from leaving me, it is because I order her to remain."

Balsamo raised his eyes to Nicole to see the effect of these contemptuous words; and he observed, from her compressed lips, that she was not insensible to the humiliations to which her position of domestic exposed her. But the emotion was transitory; for in turning away to hide it, her eyes rested with interest on a window of the room which looked into the courtyard. Everything roused the curiosity of Balsamo, and as he followed her eyes he thought he saw what interested her, — the face of a man at the window. "In truth," thought he, "every one has a mystery in this house; and I hope soon to know Mademoiselle Andrée's. I have found out the baron's, and I guess what Nicole's is." While he was thus communing with himself, the baron observed his absence of mind.

"You are in a revery, my dear guest," said he. "Well, it is infectious here, — it attacks every one. Let me reckon: first, Mademoiselle de Taverney falls into reveries; then Mademoiselle Nicole does the same; then the good-for-nothing fellow who shot the partridges is in a perpetual revery; and very likely the partridges were in a revery when he shot them."

"Gilbert?" asked Balsamo.

"Yes, — a philosopher, like Monsieur la Brie here! But speaking of philosophers, perhaps you are a friend of theirs? If so, I warn you you will be none of mine."

"No, Monsieur; I am neither for them nor against them," replied Balsamo. "I know nothing of them."

"*Ventre-bleu!* so much the better. They are wretches as mischievous as they are ugly; the monarchy will be ruined by their opinions. No one laughs now; they read, they read! And what, I pray you? Sentiments like

this: 'Under a monarchical government it is difficult for a people to be virtuous;' or this: 'Monarchy is an institution invented for the corruption of the morals of men, and with the purpose of enslaving them;' or this: 'If the power of kings comes from God, it comes as diseases and other scourges of the human race come from him.' How refreshing is all that! A virtuous people! Now, I ask you, of what use would they be? Everything has gone wrong since the king spoke to Voltaire and read Diderot!"

At this moment Balsamo thought he saw the pale face which he had seen before again appear at the window; but it vanished when he looked in that direction.

"Is Mademoiselle a philosopher?" asked Balsamo, turning to Andrée, with a smile.

"I don't know what philosophy is," replied Andrée. "I know only that I like what is serious."

"Ha! Mademoiselle!" cried the baron, "in my opinion nothing is more serious than good living; like that, then."

"But Mademoiselle does not hate life, I presume?" said Balsamo.

"That depends on circumstances," replied Andrée.

"What a stupid phrase!" exclaimed the baron; "would you believe it, Monsieur, my son once made me, word for word, a similar reply?"

"You have a son, then, Monsieur?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* Monsieur, yes! I have that misfortune. A Vicomte de Taverney, lieutenant in the body-guard of the dauphin, — a most excellent young man!" And the baron ground his teeth in uttering these four words as if he would have crushed each letter in them.

"I congratulate you, Monsieur," said Balsamo, with a

"Oh yes! another philosopher, Monsieur! Upon the

honor of a gentleman, it is sickening! Did he not speak to me the other day about giving the negroes their freedom? 'And what about sugar?' I asked. 'For I like my coffee very sweet, and so does Louis XV.' 'Monsieur,' he replied, 'is it not better to go without sugar than to make a whole race suffer?' 'A race of monkeys!' said I; and I think it was saying a great deal in their praise. Well! What do you think he said next? Faith! there must be something in the air to turn people's heads! He replied to me that all men were brothers! I the brother of a Hottentot!"

"Oh, that was going rather far!"

"Hey! what do you think of that? I am in great luck with my two children, am I not? No one will say of me that I live again in my descendants. The sister is an angel, the brother an apostle! Drink, Monsieur, drink! The wine is detestable!"

"I think it exquisite," said Balsamo, still looking at Andrée.

"Then you too are a philosopher! Take care, or I shall order my daughter to preach you a sermon. But no, philosophers have no religion. Still, religion was a very convenient thing, — one believed in God and the king, and all was settled. Now people believe in neither one nor the other; they must know so much, read so much; I prefer never doubting. In my time our only study was to amuse ourselves, — to play at faro and dice, and to fence; we ruined duchesses, and were ruined by opera-dancers. That was my history to a tittle! The whole of Taverney went to the opera. It is the only thing I regret, for a ruined man is not a man. You think me old, don't you? Well, it is because I am ruined and live in this den; because my wig is shabby, and my coat a relic of antiquity. But look at my friend

the marshal, with his coats of the newest cut and his well-curled wig and his ten thousand a year. He looks young, fresh, and gay; and yet he is ten years older than I, Monsieur, — ten years, I assure you!"

"You speak of Monsieur de Richelieu?"

"Yes."

"The duke?"

"Why, faith, not the cardinal, I think; I do not go quite so far back. Besides, the cardinal never did what his nephew did, — he did not last so long."

"I am surprised that with such powerful friends at court, you should have left it."

"Oh, a temporary retreat! I shall return to it some day or other;" and the old baron cast a singular glance at his daughter. That glance was noticed by Balsamo.

"But," said he, "the marshal might at least advance your son."

"My son! He hates him."

"Hates the son of his friend?"

"He is quite right."

"And do *you* say so, Monsieur?"

"*Pardieu!* I tell you my son is a philosopher; the marshal abhors him!"

"And Philippe returns him the compliment," said Andrée, with perfect calmness. "Remove these things, Legay!"

The young girl, roused from her fixed contemplation of the window, hastened to obey.

"Ah!" said the baron, sighing, "one used to sit after supper till two in the morning; we had what was fit to eat then, and when the eating was over, we drank. But how drink this stuff when we are not occupied in eating?

bring a flask of Maraschino, if there be one."

so," said Andrée; for the maid seemed to wait for

her orders before obeying those of the baron. The baron threw himself back in his chair, shut his eyes, and sighed with a grotesque sort of melancholy.

"You were speaking of the Maréchal de Richelieu," said Balsamo, who appeared not inclined to let the conversation drop.

"Yes," said Taverney, "I was speaking of him;" and he hummed an air as melancholy as his sighs.

"If he hate your son, and if he be right to hate him because he is a philosopher, he must retain all his friendship for you, since you are not one."

"Philosopher! no, thank God!"

"You must surely have claims on the administration? You have served the king?"

"Fifteen years. I was the marshal's aide-de-camp; we served together in the campaign of Mahon. Our friendship is of long standing. Let me see, — it began at the siege of Philipsbourg; that was in the year 1742 or 1743."

"So," said Balsamo, "you were at the siege of Philipsbourg? I was there myself."

The old man sat upright in his chair and stared at the stranger. "Excuse me," he said; "but what is your age, my dear guest?"

"Oh, I am not old!" said Balsamo, holding out his glass to be filled with Maraschino by the fair hand of Andrée.

The baron interpreted the stranger's answer in his own way, and concluded that Balsamo had some reason for concealing his age.

"Monsieur," said he, "allow me to say that you do not appear to be old enough to have served at Philipsbourg; that siege took place twenty-eight years ago, and you seem to be about thirty."

"Oh! anybody might be taken for thirty."

"*Pardieu!* then I wish that *I* could; it is just thirty years since I was of that age."

Mademoiselle Andrée gazed with increasing and irresistible curiosity on the stranger, for every word revealed him in a new light.

"Indeed, Monsieur," continued the baron, "you astonish me. Perhaps you are all this time mistaken in the name, and are thinking of some other town than Philipsbourg. I should say you were not more than thirty. Would not you, Andrée, say the same?"

"Yes, indeed," replied she, trying to sustain the steady gaze of their guest, but this time again in vain.

"No, no," said the latter, "I mean what I say, — I mean the famous siege of Philipsbourg, at which the Duc de Richelieu killed his cousin, the Prince de Lixen, in a duel. The affair took place as they were returning from the trenches, on the high road; he ran his sword right through his body! I passed just as he expired in the arms of the Prince de Deux-Ponts; he was seated against the side of a ditch, while Richelieu was coolly wiping his sword."

"On my honor, you amaze me, Monsieur," cried the baron; "it occurred precisely as you say."

"You have heard the affair described?" asked Balsamo, coolly.

"I was there. I had the honor of being second to the marshal; he was not marshal then, but that is no matter."

"Wait a moment," said Balsamo, turning and gazing firmly on him. "Did you not wear at that time the uniform of a captain?"

"Precisely."

"You were in the queen's regiment of light horse, which was cut to pieces at Fontenoi?"

"Perhaps you were at Fontenoi too?" asked the baron, trying to jest.

"No," replied Balsamo; "at that time I was dead."

The baron stared, Andrée started, Nicole crossed herself.

"But to return to what we were saying. You wore the uniform of the light horse, I remember perfectly, at that time; I saw you as I passed: you were holding your own and the marshal's horse while they fought. I went up to you and asked you about the duel; you gave me the details."

"I?"

"Yes, you, *pardieu!*—I recognize you now. You bore the title of chevalier; they called you 'the little chevalier.'"

"*Mordieu!*" cried the baron, beside himself.

"Excuse me that I did not sooner recognize you; but thirty years change a man. Let us drink the marshal's health, my dear baron." He raised his glass, and drained it to the last drop.

"You saw me there?" cried the baron; "impossible!"

"I saw you," said Balsamo.

"On the high road?"

"On the high road."

"Holding the horses?"

"Holding the horses."

"While the duel was going on?"

"As the prince was expiring, I said."

"Then you are fifty years old!"

"I am old enough to have seen what I tell you."

The baron threw himself back in his chair, but in so ridiculous a pet that Nicole could not help laughing. Andrée, instead of laughing, seemed to be in a revery, her eyes open, and fixed on those of Balsamo. He appeared now to have attained his object. Suddenly rising,

he sent from his flaming eyeball two or three lightning flashes full on her. She started, as if from an electric shock. Her arms stiffened, her neck bent, she smiled, yet as if involuntarily, on the stranger, then closed her eyes. He, still standing, touched her arms; again she started.

"Do you also, Mademoiselle," said he, "believe I speak falsely when I say that I was present at the siege of Philipsbourg?"

"No, Monsieur, I believe you," she articulated, making a violent effort.

"Then it is I who am a dotard," said the baron; "the gentleman no doubt has come back from the other world!"

Nicole gazed on him with horror.

"Who knows?" replied Balsamo, in so solemn a tone that she was yet more horrified.

"Well, then, baron," resumed the old man, "to have done with jesting, are you really more than thirty years old? You do not seem older."

"Monsieur," said Balsamo, "would you believe me if I told you a very incredible thing?"

"I do not promise that," said the baron, shaking his head with a knowing air, while Andrée listened with eager attention. "I am very incredulous, I must candidly warn you."

"What use is there, then, in putting a question, when you will not listen to my reply?"

"Well, then, I will believe you. There!—are you satisfied?"

"Then, Monsieur, I have only to repeat what I have told you, and to add that I knew you personally at the ›› of Philipsbourg."

Then you must have been a child?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Four or five years old at most?"

"No, I was forty-one."

The baron burst into a loud fit of laughter, which Nicole re-echoed.

"I told you you would not believe me," said Balsamo, gravely.

"But how is it possible to believe that? At least, give me some proofs."

"It is very clear, nevertheless," replied Balsamo, without showing any embarrassment. "I was forty-one then, but I do not say that I was the man I am."

"Oh," cried the baron, "this is going back to paganism. Was there not a philosopher — for those wretches flourished in every century — was there not a Greek philosopher who would not eat beans because he pretended that they had souls, as my son says negroes have? Who invented that idea? It was — what the devil was his name?"

"Pythagoras," said Andrée.

"Yes, Pythagoras; the Jesuits taught me that. Father Porée made me compose Latin verses on it, with little Arouet. I remember they thought mine much the best. Pythagoras? — yes."

"Well, how do you know that I am not Pythagoras?" replied Balsamo, quietly.

"I do not deny that you may be Pythagoras, but Pythagoras was not at the siege of Philipsbourg; at least, I did not see him there."

"No; but you saw the Viscount Jean des Barreaux, who was in the black musketeers."

"Yes, I knew him well · but he was no philosopher, although he did hate beans, and never ate them when he could help it."

"Well! Do you recollect, the day after the duel, Des Barreaux was in the trenches with you?"

"Yes, perfectly well."

"For you know the black musketeers and the light horse always mounted guard together, every seven days."

"True enough. What next?"

"That very evening the grape-shot fell like hail, and Des Barreaux was sad; he asked you for a pinch of snuff, and you offered him your gold box."

"On which was the likeness of a female?"

"Exactly. I see her now. She was fair, was she not?"

"*Mordieu!*" cried the baron, terrified, "you are right. Well, then?"

"Well, then," continued Balsamo, "as he was taking that pinch of snuff, a ball carried off his head, just in the same way that Marshal Berwick's was carried away formerly."

"Alas! yes, I remember," said the baron; "poor Des Barreaux!"

"And now, Monsieur, you will admit that I must have seen and known you at the siege of Philipsbourg, since I was that very Des Barreaux."

The baron fell back once more in his chair, almost stupefied at these words; but, recovering, he cried, "Why, this is sorcery, magic! A hundred years ago you would have been burned, my dear guest. Upon my honor, I think I can smell a sort of corpse-like odor!"

"Monsieur," said Balsamo, "no true sorcerer or magician has ever yet been burned; it is fools who have anything to do with the fagot. But a truce to this conversation. Mademoiselle de Taverney is asleep; it seems that metaphysics and the occult sciences have few attractions for her."

In fact, Andrée, overcome by an unknown, irresistible power, felt her head sink on her breast, like a flower whose cup bends under its weight of dew. At the last words of Balsamo she made an effort to shake off the influence that like a subtle fluid stole upon her. She shook her head, arose, seemed about to fall, and then, supported by Nicole, left the dining-room. At the same moment the face which had been looking in at the window, and which Balsamo had long ago recognized as Gilbert's, also disappeared. An instant after he heard Andrée begin to play with vigor on her harpsichord. He had followed her with his eye as she left the room, and could not help exclaiming triumphantly, as she disappeared, "I may say, like Archimedes, 'Eureka!'"

"Archimedes! Who was he?" asked the baron.

"A good sort of a fellow, — a savant whom I knew two thousand one hundred and fifty years ago," said Balsamo.

CHAPTER VII.

EUREKA.

WHETHER this piece of extravagance was too much for the baron, whether he had not heard it, or whether, having heard it, he thought it best to get rid of his strange guest, we know not; but when the sound of Andrée's harpsichord proved that she was engaged in the next apartment, he offered to procure Balsamo the means of proceeding to the nearest town. "I have an old horse," he said, "who, though on his last legs, will carry you so far; and you would at least procure good lodgings. There is, indeed, a room and a bed at Taverney; but my ideas of hospitality are rather peculiar. 'Good or none' is my motto."

"Then you send me away?" said Balsamo, hiding his vexation under a smile. "That is treating me like an intruder."

"No, indeed; it is treating you like a friend, my dear guest. Lodging you here would be really treating you as an enemy. I say this in all conscience, but with great regret, for I am delighted with your society."

"Then pray do not force me to rise when I am tired, to get on horseback when I would rather stretch my limbs in bed. Do not represent your hospitable resources as worse than they are, if you would not have me believe that I have been so unfortunate as to incur your *dislike.*"

"Oh!" said the baron, "since you view the matter in that light, you shall stay."

Then, looking round for La Brie, who was in a corner, he cried, "Come hither, you old rascal!" La Brie advanced a few steps timidly. "*Ventre-bleu*, come hither, I say! Is the red room fit to accommodate a gentleman, think you?"

"Oh, certainly, Monsieur!" replied the old servant; "you know it is occupied by M. Philippe when he comes to Taverney."

"It may do very well for a poor devil of a lieutenant who comes to pass a month with a ruined father, and at the same time be very unfit for a rich nobleman who travels post with four horses."

"I assure you," said Balsamo, "I shall be perfectly content with it."

The baron grinned, as if he would have said, "I know better;" then he added aloud, "La Brie, show the stranger to the red room, since he is determined to be cured of all wish to return to Taverney. Really, you have decided to stay?"

"Of course."

"Stay! there are still other means."

"Means for what?"

"To avoid having to make the journey on horseback."

"What journey?"

"To Bar-le-Duc."

Balsamo waited quietly to hear this new plan developed.

"You were brought here by post-horses, were you not?"

"Yes, unless Satan brought me."

"I at first almost suspected he did, for you do not seem to be on bad terms with him."

"You do me infinitely more honor than I deserve."

"Well, the horses that brought your carriage could now take it away."

"No; there are only two horses left of the four, and the carriage is heavy. Besides, post-horses must rest."

"Ha! another reason. You are determined, I see, to remain."

"Because I wish to see you again to-morrow and express my gratitude to you for your hospitality."

"That you could easily repay."

"How?"

"Since you are on such good terms with his Satanic Majesty, beg him to permit me to discover the philosopher's stone."

"Why, M. le Baron, if you really wish for it —"

"The philosopher's stone! *Parbleu!* if I really wish for it!"

"In that case you must apply to another individual than the devil."

"To whom, then?"

"To ME! as I heard Corneille say about a hundred years ago, when he was reciting to me a part of one of his comedies. We were on the Pont-Neuf in Paris."

"Ha! La Brie, you old rascal!" cried the baron, who began to find the conversation rather dangerous at such an hour and with such a man, "try and find a wax candle, and light the gentleman to his room."

La Brie hastened to obey; and during this search, almost as dubious in its result as that for the philosopher's stone, he desired Nicole to precede him upstairs and air the red room. Nicole being gone, Andrée was delighted to find herself alone. She felt as if she required to reflect. The baron bade Balsamo good-night, and retired to bed.

Balsamo looked at his watch, for he remembered the

promise he had made to Althotas, — a promise now impossible to fulfil, since two hours and a half had already elapsed. There were thirty minutes lost. He asked La Brie if the carriage was still in the place he had pointed out. La Brie replied that unless it would move away of itself, it must be there. He then asked what had become of Gilbert. La Brie assured him that Gilbert was a lazy fellow, and had probably been in bed an hour at least. Then, after having studied the topography of the passage which led to the red room, Balsamo went out to waken Althotas.

The Baron de Taverney had not spoken falsely respecting the discomfort of this apartment; it was as poorly furnished as all the other rooms of the château. An oaken bed with a faded green damask coverlet, and hangings of the same material looped up above it; an oaken table with twisted legs; a huge stone chimney-piece of the time of Louis XIII., to which in winter a fire might impart some appearance of comfort, but which now, wanting that, wanting all ornaments and utensils, wanting wood, and stuffed with old newspapers, only made the place look still more dreary, — such was the furniture of which Balsamo was for one night to be the fortunate possessor. We must add that there were two chairs and a wardrobe painted a gray color.

While La Brie was endeavoring to give a habitable appearance to the room, which Nicole had aired before retiring to her own apartment, Balsamo had wakened Althotas and returned to the house. When he reached Andrée's door, he stopped to listen. From the moment Andrée left the dining-room, she felt that she had escaped from the mysterious influence which the stranger exercised over her, and to rouse herself completely from its power she continued to play on her harpsichord. Its

sound reached Balsamo through the closed door, and, as we have said, he stopped to listen.

After a minute or two he made several gestures with a sweeping circular motion which might have been mistaken for a species of conjuration, since Andrée, struck again by the same sensation she had previously experienced, ceased to play, let her arms fall immovable by her side, and turned toward the door with a slow, stiff motion, as if she were obeying a command against her own free will. Balsamo smiled in the dark as if he saw through the door. No doubt this was all he wanted, for he stretched out his left hand, and, having found the balustrade of the staircase, which was steep and broad, he ascended to the red room. In proportion as he increased his distance, Andrée, with the same slow, rigid motion, returned to her harpsichord, and when Balsamo reached the highest stair, he heard her resume the first notes of the air which he had interrupted. Having entered his chamber, he dismissed La Brie. La Brie was evidently a good servant, accustomed to obey on the instant; but now, after moving a few steps toward the door, he stopped.

"Well?" said Balsamo.

La Brie slipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and seemed feeling for something in its silent depths; but he did not reply.

"Have you anything to say to me, my friend?" inquired Balsamo, approaching him.

La Brie made a great effort over himself, and pulled his hand out of his pocket. "I merely wished to say, Monsieur, that you made a mistake this evening," he replied.

"Did I?" said Balsamo. "How so?"

"You meant to give me a crown, and you gave me a louis-d'or;" and he opened his hand and disclosed to view the new, shining piece.

Balsamo looked at the old servant with an expression of admiration which indicated he had not the highest opinion of men as far as probity was concerned. "*And honest?*" said he, "as Hamlet says;" and, feeling in his own pocket, he drew out a second louis-d'or, which he laid beside the first in La Brie's hand.

La Brie's joy at this munificence could not be described. For twenty years he had not once seen gold; and in order to convince him that he was really the happy possessor of such a treasure, Balsamo had to put the money with his own hand into La Brie's pocket. He bowed to the ground, and was retiring without turning his back on the stranger, when the latter stopped him.

"At what hour does the family usually rise in the morning?" asked he.

"Monsieur de Taverney rises late; but Mademoiselle de Taverney is always up at a very early hour."

"At what hour?"

"About six o'clock."

"Who sleeps above this room?"

"I do, Monsieur."

"And below?"

"No one; the vestibule is under this."

"Thank you, my friend; now you may go."

"Good-night, Monsieur."

"Good-night; but, by the by, see that my carriage is safe."

"You may depend on me, Monsieur."

"If you hear any noise in it, or see any light, do not be alarmed; I have in the carriage an old, lame servant who travels with me everywhere. Tell M. Gilbert not to interfere with him; and tell him also, if you please, not to go out to-morrow morning until I have spoken to him. Can you remember all this?"

"Oh, certainly! But will Monsieur leave us so soon?"

"I am not quite sure," said Balsamo, with a smile; "yet, strictly speaking, I ought to be at Bar-le-Duc to-morrow evening."

La Brie sighed resignedly, gave a last glance at the bed, and taking up the candle, went toward the fireplace to give a little warmth to the great damp room by setting fire to the papers, as he had no wood.

"No, never mind," said Balsamo, preventing him; "leave the old papers. If I do not sleep, I can amuse myself by reading them."

La Brie bowed and retired.

Balsamo listened until the steps of the old servant had died away on the stairs, and then until he heard them overhead. Then he went to the window. In the opposite tower there was a light in the window of a garret, the curtains of which were but half-closed. It was Legay's room. She was thoughtfully unfastening her gown and handkerchief, and from time to time opened her window and leaned out to look into the courtyard. Balsamo watched her with more attention than he had chosen to bestow on her during supper. "What a singular resemblance!" he murmured to himself. At this moment the light in the garret was extinguished, although its occupant was not yet in bed.

Balsamo remained leaning against the wall. The notes of the harpsichord still sounded in his ears. He assured himself that its harmony alone broke the midnight silence; then, opening the door, which La Brie had shut, he cautiously descended the stairs, and gently pushed open the door of the salon.

Andrée heard nothing; her white hands continued to wander over the old yellow keys of the instrument. Opposite her was a mirror set in an old carved frame, the

gilding of which had changed to a dull gray. The air she played was melancholy, or rather, she played merely harmonies instead of an air. No doubt it was all extemporary; and she was thus reproducing in music her early recollections, or indulging in the dreams of her imagination. Perhaps her spirit, saddened by her residence at Taverney, had left the château to wander in the large, shady gardens of the convent of the Annonciades at Nancy, ringing with the merry voices of troops of happy boarders. Whether such were her dreams or not, her vague gaze seemed to lose itself in the sombre mirror before her, which reflected only indistinctly the different objects in the vast apartment, dimly lighted by the single candle placed on the harpsichord.

Sometimes she suddenly ceased; it was when she recalled the strange vision of the evening, and her unaccountable impressions. Before her thoughts had time to take any precise form, her heart beat, she felt a thrill run through her limbs, and she started as though a living being had come into contact with her. All at once, as she tried to account for these feelings, they returned. She felt a thrill as if from an electric shock. Her eyes became fixed, her floating thoughts became embodied, as it were, and in the mirror she saw something moving. It was the door of the salon, opening without noise; and in the doorway a shadow appeared. She shuddered, her fingers wandered involuntarily over the keys; yet nothing could be more natural than that apparition. Might it not be her father, or Nicole, or La Brie, who, before retiring, had returned to the apartment upon some household errand? La Brie's visits of that kind were frequent; and on these occasions the faithful creature never made a sound. But no; the eyes of her soul discerned that the visitor was not one of those three persons.

The shadow drew nearer with a noiseless step, becoming more distinct in the mirror; and when within the circle of the light afforded by the candle, the stranger was seen, his coat of black velvet increasing the ghastly pallor of his face. He had, for some mysterious reason, laid aside the silk coat which he wore at supper.[1]

Andrée would have turned and screamed; but Balsamo extended his arms, and she remained motionless. She made another effort. "Monsieur," said she, "in the name of Heaven, what do you want?"

He smiled, the glass reflected his smile, and she watched it with eager gaze; but he did not reply. She tried once more to rise, but could not; an irresistible power, a paralyzing feeling, accompanied by a sensation not altogether unpleasant, fixed her to her chair, while her eyes remained fixed upon the magic mirror. This new sensation alarmed her, for she felt that she was altogether in the power of the unknown. She made another almost supernatural effort to call for aid; but Balsamo extended both his hands above her head, and no sound escaped her lips. She continued dumb, her bosom loaded with a stupefying heat which ascended slowly in invading billows to her brain. She had no longer strength or will; her head sank on her shoulder.

At this moment Balsamo thought he heard a slight noise; he turned quickly, — the face of the man he had seen before was at the window. He frowned, and, strange to say, the frown was reflected on the young girl's face. Then, turning again to Andrée, he drew down his hands, which he had hitherto held above her head; then he raised them again gently, again drew them down, and

[1] It is well known that silk is a bad conductor, and repels the electric fluid. It is almost impossible to magnetize a person who wears a dress of silk.

continued thus to overwhelm her with column upon column of the electric fluid. "Sleep!" said he.

She still struggled against his power.

"Sleep!" he repeated, in a voice of command. "Sleep! it is my will!"

Then all her faculties yielded to that all-powerful will; she leaned her elbow on the harpsichord, drooped her head on her hand, and slept.

Balsamo now, without turning his face from her, left the room, closed the door, and went up to his own chamber. Scarcely had he retired when the face once more appeared at the window. It was Gilbert's.

CHAPTER VIII.

ATTRACTION.

GILBERT, whose menial position in the château of Taverney caused him to be excluded from the salon, watched all the evening those whose rank permitted them to enter there. During supper he saw Balsamo's looks and gestures; he remarked Andrée's attention to him, the baron's unusual affability, and the respectful eagerness of La Brie. When the party rose from table he hid in a clump of shrubs, lest Nicole, in closing the shutters or in going to her own room, should see him, and put an end to his espionage. Nicole had, indeed, made her round to secure all for the night; but one of the shutters of the salon she had been forced to leave open, the loosened hinge of which would not permit it to close. Gilbert was aware of this fact; so he remained out, certain that he could continue his watchings when Legay was gone. His watchings, have we said? What reason had Gilbert to watch? Having been brought up in the château of Taverney, did he not know it perfectly, as well as the habits of the family? The reason was that on that evening he had other motives than those which usually actuated him; he not only watched, but waited.

When Nicole went away from the salon, leaving Andrée there, after having slowly closed the doors and shutters she walked for a few minutes up and down in front of the *house, as if she* expected some one. Then she looked fur-

tively on all sides, peeped into the salon, waited a little longer, and at length made up her mind to go to bed.

Gilbert, motionless, bending down close to the trunk of a tree, and scarcely venturing to breathe, saw every movement and gesture of Nicole; and when she had disappeared, and when he saw a light in the windows of her apartment, he stole again on tiptoe to the window, leaned forward, and continued, although scarcely knowing why, with eager eyes to devour Andrée, who was sitting at her harpsichord in a listless attitude.

Just then Joseph Balsamo entered the salon. Gilbert shuddered on seeing him, and all his faculties were strained to enable him to comprehend the scene which we have just described. He thought that Balsamo complimented Andreé on her musical talent; that she replied with her usual coldness; that, with a smile, he repeated his praise; and that then she came out from her revery to reply, and to dismiss him for the night. He admired the grace with which the stranger retired backward; but he had in reality understood nothing of the scene, as it had all passed in silence. He had heard no words; he had seen the lips and hands of the pair before him move, and close observer as he was, he discovered no mystery in what appeared to be done so naturally.

Balsamo gone, Gilbert remained no longer in an attitude of observation, but apparently was lost in contemplation of Andrée, — so beautiful in her careless attitude; but soon, to his amazement, he discovered that she was asleep. He remained for some moments longer in the same position, to be certain that such was the case; then, when he was quite convinced, he clasped his forehead with both hands, like one who fears that his brain will give way under the flood of thoughts by which it is oppressed.

"Oh!" said he wildly, "her hand!—that my lips might only touch her hand! Gilbert, Gilbert, rouse thee! I will do it!"

As he spoke he rushed into the ante-room and reached the door of the salon, which, as when Balsamo entered, opened without noise. But scarcely was it open, scarcely did he find the young girl before him without anything separating them, when he felt all the importance of the step he had taken. He the son of a farmer and a peasant woman; he, the timid young man, who in his lowness dared hardly raise his eyes to his haughty mistress,—he was going to press to his lips the hem of the robe or the tip of the finger of this sleeping majesty, who, if she awoke, would with a look crush him to the dust. At this idea all that had intoxicated him and made him bold vanished; he stopped and clung to the door-post, for he trembled and felt as if he should fall.

But Andrée's meditation or sleep (for Gilbert could not yet decide whether she slept or was only buried in thought) was so deep that she made no movement, although she might have heard the beating of his heart, which he tried in vain to still. He remained a minute gazing on her; but she did not stir. She was so beautiful, with her head gently bent forward on her hand, her long, unpowdered hair falling on her shoulders, that the flame, which fear for a moment had extinguished, was rekindled. His madness returned; he must at least touch something touched by her. He made a step toward her. The floor creaked under his unsteady footstep. At that noise a cold moisture stood on his forehead; but she seemed to have heard nothing.

"She sleeps!" he murmured; "oh, joy, she sleeps!"

But before he advanced three steps farther he stopped again. It was the unusual brightness of the candle which

alarmed him now, for it had burned down in the socket, and gave, as is usual, a larger flame just before it expired. But not a sound, not a breath in the house. La Brie had retired to bed, and no doubt to sleep, and the light in Nicole's chamber was extinguished.

"Courage!" said he, and he advanced anew. Strange, the floor creaked again; but Andrée stirred not, and Gilbert could scarcely avoid being frightened by this mysterious repose.

"She sleeps!" repeated he again, with that varying resolution peculiar to the lover and the coward; and he who is not master of his heart is always a coward. "She sleeps! Oh, my God, my God!"

In the midst of all these feverish alternations of fear and hope Gilbert still advanced until he was within two paces of Andrée. Then he felt as if fascinated. He would have fled, were flight possible; but once within the circle of attraction of which she was the centre, he felt himself rooted to the spot, and, conquered, subdued, he fell on his knees. Andrée remained motionless as a statue. Gilbert took the hem of her dress in both hands, and kissed it; then he looked up slowly, breathlessly. His eyes met hers, which were wide open, yet she did not see him.

Gilbert no longer knew what to think; he was overwhelmed with astonishment. For a moment the horrible idea that she was dead flashed across his mind. He seized her hand: it was warm, and the pulse beat softly; but this hand remained unresistingly in his. Then, bewildered by having touched it, he imagined that she saw, that she felt, that she had discovered his maddening passion, — poor, blinded heart! — that she expected his visit, that her silence indicated consent, her immovability favor. He raised her hand to his lips, and imprinted on it a long and burning kiss. Immediately a shudder ran through

her frame, and Gilbert felt that she repelled him. "I am lost!" he murmured, relinquishing her hand and throwing himself upon the floor.

Andrée rose as if moved by a spring; and not once casting her eyes to the floor on which Gilbert lay overcome by shame and fear, without even strength to ask a pardon which he knew would not be granted, her head erect, her neck rigid, and with a painful and constrained step, she moved toward the door. She passed on like one drawn by a secret spell to an unseen goal, and in passing she touched Gilbert's shoulder. He raised himself on one hand, turned slowly, and followed her with eyes full of amazement. She opened the door, passed into the anteroom, and reached the foot of the stairs. Pale and trembling, Gilbert dragged himself after her on his knees.

"Oh," thought he, "she is so indignant that she would not deign to show me her anger! She is going to the baron to relate my shameful infatuation, and I shall be turned out like a disgraced lackey!"

The thought that he should be dismissed, that he should no longer see her who was his light, his life, his soul, gave him courage; he arose and hurried after her. "Oh, pardon, Mademoiselle! In the name of Heaven, pardon!" he murmured.

Andrée appeared not to have heard him, passed on, but did not enter her father's apartment. Gilbert breathed more freely. She advanced toward the staircase, and began to ascend.

"Great Heaven!" murmured he, "where can she be going? That is the way to the red room, which the stranger occupies, and to La Brie's loft. It may be to call him, — yet she would ring; she must be going — oh, impossible, impossible!" and he wrung his hands with rage at the thought that she was going into Balsamo's apartment.

She stopped before the door. A cold perspiration trickled down Gilbert's forehead; he grasped the iron of the balustrade that he might not fall, for he had continued to follow her. All that he saw and all that he fancied filled him with horror.

Balsamo's door was half open. Andrée did not knock, but pushed against it and entered the room. The light within fell on her noble features, and was reflected with a golden lustre from her large, open eyes. Gilbert could see the stranger standing in the middle of the chamber, with his eyes fixed, his brow contracted, and one hand extended with a commanding gesture. Then the door was shut.

Gilbert felt his strength abandon him. He put his hand to his head and fell heavily on the cold stone of the upper step of the stairs, but with his eyes turned on the accursed door which entombed his past dreams, his present happiness, his future hopes.

CHAPTER IX.

CLAIRVOYANCE.

Balsamo advanced to meet the young lady, who moved toward him in a direct line, rigid in her movement as the bronze statue in Don Juan. However strange her coming might seem to any other than Balsamo, he appeared in no degree surprised at it.

"I commanded you to sleep," said he; "do you sleep?"

She sighed, but did not answer. Balsamo drew nearer her, imparting to her still more of the electric fluid.

"It is my will that you speak," he said.

She started.

"Have you heard my command?"

Andrée assented by a gesture.

"Then why do you not speak?"

She put her hand to her throat, as if to indicate that she could not articulate.

"Well, sit down!" said Balsamo.

He took her by the hand which Gilbert had so lately kissed without her perceiving it, and his touch gave her that shudder which she had then exhibited, but which had been caused by the electric fluid descending on her at that moment from the room above. Led by him, she made three steps backward and sat down in an arm-chair.

"Do you see?" he asked.

Her eyes dilated as if she tried to take in all the rays of light in the apartment.

"I do not mean to ask if you see with your eyes. Do you see inwardly?" and drawing from under his embroidered coat a little rod of steel, he touched her heaving breast. She bounded as if a dart of flame had pierced her and entered her heart, and then her eyes closed.

"And now you begin to see?" he said.

She bowed in assent.

"And you will soon speak?"

"Yes," replied Andrée; but at the same moment she put her hand to her head in a manner indicating great suffering.

"What is the matter?" asked Balsamo.

"I am in pain."

"Wherefore?"

"Because you force me to see and speak."

He made several movements over her head, as if to lessen the influence of the electricity. "Do you suffer now?" he asked.

"Not so much."

"Well, then, look, and see where you are."

Her eyes remained closed, but her face expressed great surprise. "I am in the red chamber!" she murmured.

"With whom?"

"With you!" she continued, shuddering.

"What is the matter?"

"I am afraid; I am ashamed!"

"Of what? Are we not united by sympathy?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"And you know that I have caused you to come here with a pure intention?"

"True, true," said she.

"That I respect you as a sister?"

"I know it, indeed!" and her face grew calm, then again was troubled.

"You do not tell me all," said Balsamo. "You do not pardon me entirely."

"Because I see that though you would not wrong me, you would wrong others perhaps."

"Possibly," he muttered; "but look not at that!" he added, in an authoritative tone.

Her face resumed its usual expression.

"Are all asleep in the house?"

"I do not know."

"Then look and see."

"Where shall I look?"

"Let me see, — first, in your father's room; what is he doing?"

"He is in bed."

"Asleep?"

"No; he is reading."

"What is he reading?"

"One of those bad books which he wishes me to read."

"And you will not read them?"

"No!" said she, with an expression of the greatest scorn on her features.

"Well, we are safe then in that quarter. Look in Nicole's room."

"There is no light in her room."

"But you do not want light to see."

"Not if you command me."

"See! It is my will."

"Ah, I see her!"

"Well?"

"She is half undressed; she is opening her door softly; she is going downstairs!"

"So! Where is she going?"

"She stops at the courtyard gate; she waits behind it; she watches!"

Balsamo smiled. "Is she watching to see whether you are out?"

"No."

"Well, that is the principal matter; for when a young lady is free from her father's and her waiting-maid's eye, she has nothing to fear unless —"

"No."

"Ah! ah! you reply to my thought."

"I see it."

"Then you have no lover?"

"I?" asked she disdainfully.

"Yes; you might be in love, I think. Young people do not leave their convents to be shut up. They give liberty to their hearts when their persons are set free!"

Andrée shook her head. "My heart is free," she said, sadly; and such an expression of candor and virgin modesty lighted her features that Balsamo exclaimed with rapture, "A lily! a true pupil! a clairvoyante!" and he clasped his hands with joy and gratitude.

Then turning again to Andrée, "But if you do not love, you may be loved," said he.

"I do not know," replied she, softly.

"What, you do not know!" he cried, imperiously. "When I question, I expect a proper answer;" and he touched her bosom again with the steel rod. She started, but without evincing so much pain as before.

"Yes, I see," said she; "but be gentle, or you will kill me."

"What do you see?"

"Oh — but no! It cannot be," said she.

"What, then, do you see?"

"A young man who, ever since my leaving the convent, has followed me, watched me, brooded over me, yet always secretly."

"Who is the young man?"

"I do not see his face. I see his coat, — it is like that of a workman."

"Where is he?"

"At the foot of the stairs. He seems in sorrow, he weeps."

"Why can you not see his face?"

"It is hidden in his hands."

"Look through his hands."

Andrée seemed to make an effort; then she exclaimed, "Gilbert! I said truly that it was impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"He? — he dares not love me!" she cried, with a lofty expression of disdain.

Balsamo smiled, like one who knows mankind, and who is aware that there is no distance the heart will not overleap, were there an abyss between it and its object.

"And what is he doing at the foot of the staircase?"

"Stay. He removes his hands from his face; he seizes the balustrade; he ascends."

"Ascends whither?"

"To us here; but no matter, — he dares not come in."

"Why not?"

"Because he is afraid," said Andrée, with a smile of contempt.

"But he will listen?"

"Yes; for he is now putting his ear to the door."

"That annoys you?"

"Yes, he may hear what I say."

"And would he use it against her whom he loves?"

"Yes, in a moment of passion or jealousy; in such a moment he would be capable of anything."

"Then let us get rid of him," said Balsamo; and he walked noisily to the door.

Gilbert's hour to be courageous had not yet come; for hearing Balsamo's step, and fearing to be caught, he jumped astride on the balustrade, and slid down noiselessly to the bottom of the staircase. Andrée uttered a stifled cry.

"Look no more in that direction," said Balsamo, returning toward her; "the loves of the vulgar are of no importance. Speak to me of the Baron de Taverney, will you?"

"I will answer what you choose," said she, sighing.

"The baron is very poor, is he not?"

"Very poor."

"Too poor to allow you any amusement?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You are heartily tired of Taverney?"

"Heartily!"

"You are ambitious, perhaps?"

"No."

"You love your father?"

"Yes," said the young girl, with hesitation.

"Yet I thought this evening your filial love was not very apparent," said Balsamo, smiling.

"I am vexed at him for having wasted my mother's fortune, so that poor Maison Rouge has to pass his time in garrison, and cannot worthily support the dignity of our family."

"Who is this Maison Rouge?"

"My brother Philippe."

"Why do you call him Maison Rouge?"

"It is — or rather it was — the name of one of our castles; and the eldest of the family bears it until the death of the chief: then he is called Taverney."

"You love your brother, then?"

"Oh, dearly, dearly!"

"More than any one in the world?"

"More than any one in the world."

"Why do you love him so warmly, and your father so coldly?"

"Because he has a noble heart; he would die for me."

"And your father?"

She was silent.

"You do not answer."

"I do not wish to answer."

Doubtless Balsamo thought it better not to urge her on this point; and perhaps also he already knew as much of the baron as he wished.

"And where is the Chevalier Maison Rouge at this moment?"

"You ask me where Philippe is?"

"Yes."

"In the garrison at Strasburg."

"Do you see him there?"

"Where?"

"At Strasburg."

"I do not see him."

"Do you know that town?"

"No."

"I know it. Let us visit it together, will you?"

"Yes, with pleasure."

"Is he at the theatre?"

"No."

"Is he at the coffee-house in the square, with the other officers?"

"No."

"Has he gone back to his apartment? I wish you to look for him there."

"I see nothing. I think he is not in Strasburg."

"Do you know the road?"

"No."

"I know it; follow me. Is he at Saverne?"

"No."

"Is he at Saarbrück?"

"No."

"Is he at Nancy?"

"Stay, stay!" The young girl seemed collecting all her powers; her heart beat, her bosom heaved. "I see him! I see him! Dear Philippe, — what happiness!"

"What is he doing?"

"Dear Philippe!" continued Andrée, her eyes sparkling with joy.

"Where is he?"

"On horseback, riding through a town I know well."

"What town?"

"Nancy, Nancy! where I was at the convent."

"Are you sure that it is he?"

"Oh, yes! the torches around show his face."

"Torches!" said Balsamo, with surprise; "why, are there torches?"

"He is on horseback, at the door of a magnificent carriage, richly gilt."

"Ah!" cried Balsamo, who appeared to comprehend this, "who is in the carriage?"

"A young lady, — oh, how majestic she is! how graceful! how beautiful! Strange! I almost fancy I have seen her before. No; it is Nicole's features which resemble hers."

"Nicole resembles the young lady who is so beautiful and so majestic?"

"Yes, yes; but as a jasmine resembles a lily."

"Let us see what is happening at Nancy at this moment."

"The young lady bends forward and makes a sign to

Phillippe to approach; he obeys, and takes off his hat respectfully."

"Can you hear what they say?"

"I will listen," said Andrée, imposing silence on Balsamo by a gesture. "I hear, I hear!" she murmured.

"What does the young lady say?"

"She orders him, with a sweet smile, to hasten the pace of the horses. She says she will require her escort to be ready at six in the morning, as she wishes to stop on the road."

"To stop? Where?"

"My brother is just asking her. Heavens! she wishes to stop at Taverney to see my father! Oh, such a great princess at our poor house! What shall we do?—without plate, almost without linen!"

"Do not be uneasy; that will be provided for."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" And the young girl, who had half risen from her seat, sank back, with a heavy sigh, completely exhausted.

Balsamo immediately approached her; and changing by magnetic passes the direction of the electric currents, he restored the tranquillity of sleep to that lovely frame which had bent down exhausted, to that head sinking on her palpitating bosom. Andrée appeared to fall into a complete and refreshing repose.

"Recover thy strength," said Balsamo, gazing at her with a stern delight; "I shall soon require thy light again. O Science!" continued he, with the rapture of exalted faith, "thou alone never deceivest us; to thee, then, man ought to sacrifice every feeling. This young girl is beautiful, pure as an angel; and He who made beauty and innocence knows how dear they ought to be to us. But let the creature perish — how pure, how perfect, how beautiful soever she be — if I can but make her

speak the words of truth! Let all the delights of the world — love, passion, rapture — exist no longer for me if I can only with a firm step advance on the path of light and science. And now, young girl, now that my will has given thee strength, awake! — or rather, sink again in the sleep which reveals all things! Speak again; but now it is for me that thou must speak."

He spread his hands over her head, and forced her to sit up by breathing upon her. Seeing her ready and submissive, he took from his pocket-book a curl of jet-black hair, which he put into Andrée's hand.

"See!" he commanded.

"Again!" said she, with anguish. "Oh, no! let me rest; it is too painful, — and just now I felt so happy!"

"See!" replied Balsamo, pitilessly, touching her again with the steel rod.

She wrung her hands, struggling to evade the tyranny of the experimenter. The foam was on her lips, as formerly it gathered on those of the pythoness on her sacred tripod.

"I see, I see!" cried she, with the despair of a subdued will.

"What do you see?"

"A woman."

"Ah!" murmured Balsamo, with wild joy, "science is not, then, a useless word, like virtue! Mesmer is greater than Brutus! Describe the woman, that I may know you really see her whom I would have you see."

"She is a brunette, tall, with blue eyes, jet-black hair, and sinewy arms."

"What is she doing?"

"She gallops, she flies forward, carried by a splendid horse reeking with sweat and foam."

"In what direction?"

"There, there!" said the young girl, pointing to the west.

"On the highway?"

"Yes."

"Toward Chalons?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Balsamo; "she takes the road which I shall take. She goes to Paris, as I do; I shall find her there. Now rest," said he; and he took from Andrée's hand the curl of hair.

Her arms fell powerless by her side.

"Now return to your harpsichord."

Andrée arose and made a step toward the door; but, overcome by inexpressible fatigue, her limbs refused to support her. She staggered.

"Renew your strength and walk!" said Balsamo, enveloping her anew with magnetic passes; and she, like the generous steed that braces every nerve to fulfil his master's will, unjust though it be, walked erect. Balsamo opened the door, and, still sleeping, she descended the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

NICOLE LEGAY.

While the inquisition by Balsamo was going on, Gilbert remained under the railings at the foot of the staircase in a state of indescribable torture. Not daring to ascend again to listen at the door of the red chamber, he fell into despair; and this despair was increased tenfold by the feeling of his weakness and his inferiority.

Balsamo was only a man (for Gilbert, being a profound thinker, a philosopher in embryo, had small faith in sorcerers). But then this man was strong, and he was weak; this man was courageous, and Gilbert was not so yet. Twenty times he arose, determined to beard the stranger, and twenty times his trembling limbs bent under him, and he sank on his knees. Then the thought struck him that he would get a ladder used by La Brie (who was at the same time cook, butler, and gardener) for nailing the jasmine and honeysuckle against the walls, and by propping it against the balcony of the apartment he would be enabled to mount to the window and witness what he so ardently desired to discover.

He passed stealthily into the courtyard, and ran to the spot where the ladder lay; but as he was stooping to take it up he thought he heard a noise in the direction of the house, and he turned. He was almost certain that in the obscurity he saw a human form enter the dark frame of the open door, but moving so quickly and so noiselessly that it appeared rather a spectre than a living being.

He let the ladder fall, and, his heart beating audibly, hastened back toward the château.

Some minds are constitutionally superstitious, and these are generally the most exalted and the richest in fancy. They admit the fabulous more readily than the rational, because what is natural is too common for them, impelled as they are toward the impossible, or at least toward the ideal. Such spirits delight in the darkness of the forest, the depths of which they people with phantoms or genii. The ancients, who were poets in all things, saw these fantastic beings in open day; but as their sun, warmer and brighter than ours, forbade the fancy to bring forth spectres and demons, they filled the forest with smiling dryads and wood-nymphs. Gilbert, born in a gloomier clime, imagined he saw a spirit. This time, in spite of his incredulity, he recalled the words of the woman who had fled from Balsamo, and the idea flashed across his mind that the sorcerer might have summoned up some evil spirit to do his bad behests. But Gilbert had always after a first impression a second not more encouraging, for it was the result of reflection. He recalled all the arguments of powerful minds against the belief in the return of spirits to this world, and a remembrance of the article "Spectre" in the "Philosophical Dictionary" restored his courage; but it was only to give him another apprehension better founded and more alarming. If he had indeed seen any one it must have been a real person, deeply interested in watching him. Fear suggested M. de Taverney; his conscience whispered another name. He looked up to Nicole's apartment; her candle was out, not a ray of light was visible, — not a whisper, not a movement, not a light in all the house except in the stranger's room. He looked, he listened; then, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, he took up the ladder again, convinced that he had been

deceived, and that this vision had been the result of a suspension of his observing faculties rather than of their exercise.

Just as he was about to place his ladder, Balsamo's door opened and then shut. At this sound he hurried in, and saw Andrée glide out and descend the stairs without noise and without a light, as if guided and supported by a supernatural power. Having reached the landing-place, she passed by where he had now concealed himself in the shade, her dress touching him as she passed, and continued her way. The baron was asleep, La Brie in bed, Nicole in the other turret, Balsamo's door closed, — he could not be surprised by any one. He made a violent effort and followed Andrée, adapting his step to hers, and keeping at a distance from her. She passed through the ante-room into the salon; but although she left the door open, he stopped just before he reached it. Should he enter? He hesitated, then resolved; but just as his foot was on the threshold, an arm was stretched out in the darkness, and he was firmly grasped. Gilbert turned, his heart panting as if it would burst his bosom.

"So I have caught you at last!" whispered an angry voice close at his ear. "Deny now, if you can, that you have meetings, — that you are in love with her!"

Gilbert had not strength to shake himself loose from the grasp which detained him, yet it was only that of a young girl, — it was simply the hand of Nicole Legay that held him.

"What do you mean?" whispered he, impatiently.

"Oh! I am to speak it out, then?" and Nicole raised her voice nearly to the loudest pitch.

"No; for God's sake be quiet!" replied Gilbert between his closed teeth, and dragging her away from the door.

"Well, come with me, then!"

This was what Gilbert wanted, for by going away with her, he took her away from Andrée. He followed Nicole, who led the way into the courtyard, shutting the door behind her when he had passed.

"But," said Gilbert, "Mademoiselle will be retiring to her apartment; she will call you to help her to undress, and you will not be in the house."

"Do you think I care for that now? Let her call or not, I must speak to you."

"You might put off until tomorrow what you have to say, Nicole. You know Mademoiselle Andrée is strict."

"Yes, I would advise her to be strict, — particularly with me."

"To-morrow, Nicole, I promise — "

"You promise! I know what your fine promises are. This very day you promised to meet me near Maison Rouge. Where were you? Why, in the very opposite direction, since you brought the traveller hither! Your promises indeed! I believe them just as I did those of our confessor at the Annonciades, who swore to keep secret what we confessed, and then told all our sins to the abbess!"

"But, Nicole, you will be dismissed if you are seen."

"And you, — will you not be dismissed for being in love with my young lady? Do you think the baron too generous for that?"

"He could surely have no motive for dismissing me," said Gilbert, endeavoring to defend himself.

"Oh, none in the world! The baron, perhaps, allows you to pay your addresses to his daughter. I really did not know he was quite so much a philosopher!"

Gilbert might easily have proved to Nicole, by relating what he had just witnessed, that if he was to blame, at

least Andrée was not privy to his misconduct; and incredible as her visit to the stranger's apartment would have appeared, Nicole, thanks to the good opinion women have of one another, would have believed him. But deeper reflection arrested the words on his lips. Andrée's secret was one that might serve him, as it placed her completely in his power; and as he loved Andrée infinitely more than he feared Nicole, he was silent on the singular events he had just witnessed. "Well," said he, "since you insist on having an explanation, let us understand each other."

"Oh! that is easily done. But you are right, — this is a bad place for it; let us go to my room."

"To your room? Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"We might be surprised."

"Indeed! and who would surprise us? Mademoiselle? True; she might be jealous about her sweet youth. Unfortunately for her, since her secret is discovered, I am not afraid of her. Mademoiselle Andrée jealous of Nicole! What an honor!" And the forced laugh of the young girl frightened Gilbert more than any invective or menace could possibly have done.

"It is not Mademoiselle of whom I am afraid," said he; "I am anxious only on your own account, Nicole."

"Oh, most anxious, no doubt! But you are going to my room for no bad purpose; and you have often told me that where there is no bad intention there should be no shame. Philosophers are Jesuits sometimes; and our confessor at the Annonciades told me all that before you. Come, come, no more false reasons! Come to my room; I am resolved you shall!"

"Nicole!" said he, grinding his teeth.

"Well! what more?"

"Take care!" and he raised his hand.

"Oh, I am not afraid! You struck me once; but you were jealous then. At that time you loved me, and I allowed you to strike me. But I shall not now, — no, no, no! for you no longer love me, and it is I who am jealous now."

"But what will you do?" cried Gilbert, grasping her wrist.

"I shall scream, and Mademoiselle will hear me. I advise you to let go your hold of me."

Gilbert dropped her hand; then seizing the ladder, and dragging it cautiously after him, he placed it against the wall of the turret, so that it reached to Nicole's window.

"See how things turn in this world," said she, maliciously. "The ladder which was to assist you to climb to Mademoiselle's apartment must merely serve you to descend from my humble attic. Very flattering for me, is it not?"

Nicole, perceiving the advantage she had gained, declared her triumph with that precipitate eagerness which women, unless, indeed, of very superior minds, often exhibit, — a victory which is often too dearly purchased.

Gilbert, who felt himself in a false position, was silent, and followed the young girl, reserving all his powers for the approaching contest. In the first place, however, like a prudent general, he satisfied himself on two points. The first was, in passing before the window, that Mademoiselle de Taverney was still in the salon; and the second, on reaching Nicole's chamber, that in case of necessity, he could reach the ladder without much risk of breaking his neck, and thus allow himself to slide to the ground.

Nicole's room was as simple in its furniture as the rest of the house. It was a loft, the walls of which were

covered with a drab and green paper. A corded bedstead and a large geranium placed near the window furnished the room. There was also a large bonnet-box, given her by Andrée, which served both for table and wardrobe. Nicole sat down on the edge of the bed, Gilbert on a corner of the box. She had had time to calm down while ascending the stairs; and now, completely mistress of herself, she felt strong in having justice on her side. Gilbert, on the contrary, was agitated, and could not recover his coolness; his anger had increased as hers decreased.

"So," said she, "you are in love with Mademoiselle, and you have attempted to deceive me?"

"Who told you I was in love with Mademoiselle?"

"What! were you not going to a rendezvous with her?"

"Who told you that I had a rendezvous with her?"

"With whom, then, had you to do in the pavilion, — with the sorcerer?"

"Possibly; you know that I am ambitious."

"Say envious."

"It is the same word taken in a bad sense."

"Don't let us dispute about words. You love me no longer, do you?"

"Yes, I do; I love you still."

"Then why do you avoid me?"

"Because you quarrel with me whenever I meet you."

"That is because you always avoid me."

"You know I am shy, — that I love solitude."

"Yes; and you seek solitude ladder in hand!"

Gilbert was beaten on his first move.

"Come, come! be frank if you can, Gilbert, and confess that you no longer love me, or that you love two women at once."

"Well, and if I did, what would you say?"

"I should say it is monstrous!"

"No, no! — that there was an error somewhere."

"In your heart?"

"No, in our social state. You know there are nations where every man is allowed seven or eight wives."

"They are not Christians," said Nicole, pettishly.

"They are philosophers," said Gilbert, with dignity.

"So, Master Philosopher, you would wish me to take a second lover, as you have done!"

"I would not be unjust and tyrannical; I would not wish to repress the impulses of your heart. Freedom, blessed freedom, respects free-will. If you change your love, Nicole, I shall not force you to a fidelity which in my opinion is unnatural."

"Ah, I see plainly you no longer love me!"

Gilbert was strong in argument, — not that he was skilful in logic, but he was an adept in paradox, and however little he knew, he still knew more than Nicole. She had read only what amused her, — he what taught him a little also; and as they talked, he regained his presence of mind, while Nicole began to lose hers.

"Has the great philosopher any memory?" asked Nicole, with an ironical smile.

"Sometimes," replied Gilbert.

"Then you have not forgotten, perhaps, what you said to me five months ago, when I came with Mademoiselle from the Annonciades?"

"I have forgotten; tell me."

"You said, 'I am poor.' It was the day we were reading 'Tanzaï' among the old ruins."

"Well, go on."

"You trembled very much that day."

"Very likely, — I am naturally timid; but I do all I can to correct that fault, and some others also."

"So that when you have corrected all your faults," said Nicole, laughing, "you will be perfect."

"I shall be strong, at least; for wisdom gives strength."

"Where did you read that, pray?"

"Never mind; return to what you were saying."

Nicole felt that she was losing ground every minute.

"Well, you said to me, 'I am poor, — no one loves me; yet there is something here,' and you pressed your hand on your heart."

"No, Nicole; if I pressed my hand anywhere when I said that, it must have been on my forehead. The heart is merely a forcing-pump, which drives the blood to the extremities of the body. Read the article 'Heart' in the 'Philosophical Dictionary;'" and Gilbert drew himself up proudly. Humble before Balsamo, he gave himself the airs of a prince before Nicole.

"You are right, Gilbert; it must have been your head which you struck. Well, striking your forehead, you said, 'I am treated here worse than a dog, — indeed, Mahon is in a happier condition than I.' I replied that they were wrong not to love you; that if you had been my brother I should have loved you. I think, however, I said that from my heart, not from my head; but perhaps I am wrong, for I never read the 'Philosophical Dictionary.'"

"You ought to read it, Nicole."

"Then you threw your arms round me. You said, 'You are an orphan, I am one too; let us love one another as if we were brother and sister, — no! better than if we were; for if we were, we should be forbidden to love as I wish we should;' then you kissed me."

"Very possibly!"

"Did you think then as you spoke?"

"Oh, yes! one generally thinks what he says at the time he says it."

"So that now —?"

"Now I am five months older than I was. I have learned things of which I knew nothing then, and I look forward to things which I do not yet know; I think differently now."

"You are a deceiver, a hypocrite, a liar!" Nicole exclaimed, furiously.

"No more than a traveller, should he make two different answers to the same question, — if you asked him in a valley what he thought of the prospect, and again when he had got to the top of a mountain which before had closed his view. I have a wider outlook, that is all."

"So then you will not marry me?"

"I never said that I would marry you," said Gilbert, contemptuously.

"And yet," cried the exasperated girl, "I think Nicole Legay fully the equal of Sebastian Gilbert."

"All human beings are equal; but nature or education makes certain faculties greater in one man than another, and according as these faculties are more or less developed men differ from one another."

"So that your faculties being more developed than mine, you are raised above me?"

"Quite correct; you do not reason yet, Nicole, but you understand."

"Yes, yes; I understand!" cried Nicole, with redoubled passion.

"What do you understand?"

"That you are a bad man."

"It is possible. Many are born with bad inclinations. Rousseau himself had evil impulses, but he corrected them; I shall do the same."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Nicole, "how could I ever love such a man?"

"You did not love me, Nicole," replied Gilbert, coldly; "I pleased you, — that was all. You had just come from Nancy, where you had seen only students whom you laughed at, or soldiers who frightened you; so you took a fancy to me, and for a month or two we enjoyed our dream of love. But should we therefore be tied together to be eternally miserable? You see, Nicole, if we bound ourselves for our lives in a moment of happiness, we should give up our free-will, and that would be absurd!"

"Is that philosophy?" asked Nicole.

"I think so," replied Gilbert.

"Then there is nothing sacred in the eyes of you philosophers?"

"Oh, yes! — reason is."

"Yet I think you once said something about being faithful to the choice of the heart. You recollect your theory on marriages — ?"

"On unions, Nicole, for I shall never marry."

"You will never marry?"

"No! I shall be a learned man, — a philosopher. Science requires perfect freedom of the mind, and philosophy that of the body."

"Monsieur Gilbert," said she, "you are a wretch; and whatever I am, I am at least better than you."

"Now," said Gilbert, rising, "we are only losing time, — you in abusing me, I in listening to you; let us end! You loved me because you took pleasure in loving."

"Well?"

"Well, there is no reason in the world that I should make myself unhappy because you did a thing which gave you gratification."

"Fool!" she exclaimed, "you think you can confound my common-sense; and you pretend not to fear me!"

"Fear you! Why, Nicole, jealousy is turning your brain!"

"Jealousy!" she cried, stamping her foot, "and why should I be jealous? Is there a prettier girl in the province than I?—if I had but as white hands as Mademoiselle; and I shall have some day, when I do no more hard work. You are my first lover, it is true, but you are not the first man who has paid court to me. Gilbert, Gilbert! do not force me to seek revenge on you; do not make me leave the narrow path in which a last remembrance of my mother and the regular repetition of my prayers have kept me. Gilbert, if you do, you may have to reproach yourself with bringing many evils on yourself and others."

"All in good time," said Gilbert. "So now that you have got to the summit of your dignity, Nicole, I am perfectly satisfied on one point."

"And what may that be?" inquired the girl.

"Simply that if I consented now to marry you—"

"What then?"

"Why, that you would refuse me."

Nicole paused, her clenched hands and gnashing teeth showing the workings of her mind. "You are right," she exclaimed at length. "Yes; I also begin to ascend that mountain of which you spoke. I see a wider prospect before me. The wife of a learned man, a philosopher! No, I am destined for something greater than that! Mount your ladder! and don't break your neck,—though I begin to think it would be a blessing for many persons if you would, perhaps even for yourself."

She turned her back on him. Gilbert stood a moment wavering and irresolute; for Nicole, excited by anger and jealousy, was truly beautiful. But he had resolved to break with her; Nicole could blast at once his love and his ambition. His decision was made.

In a few seconds Nicole, hearing no sound, looked behind her; she was alone.

"Gone!" she murmured. "And Mademoiselle? Oh, I shall know to-morrow whether she loves him or not!"

She went to the window and looked out; all was dark, every light extinguished. She stole on tiptoe to her young lady's door and listened. "She is in bed, — she sleeps soundly," said she; "but to-morrow I shall know all!"

CHAPTER XI.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

THE calmness with which Nicole returned to her room was not affected. Young, strong, full of an uncultivated self-confidence, she was blest with that faculty so important for those who would govern where they love, — the faculty of forgetting; and she could sleep after she had arranged her plan of vengeance with the little malicious sprites that dwelt in her heart.

Mademoiselle de Taverney appeared to her even more guilty than Gilbert. This aristocratic girl, rigid in her prejudices, elevated in her pride, who at their convent would descend to familiarity with none below the daughters of marquises, — this statue, outwardly so cold, but yet with feeling in its marble bosom; this statue, warming to life for a rural Pygmalion like Gilbert, became contemptible in her estimation. For Nicole felt that Gilbert was her inferior in everything but a little reading, and thought that she had condescended very much when she, the waiting-maid of the daughter of a ruined baron, put herself on a level with the son of a poor peasant. What, then, could she think of her mistress, if she really returned Gilbert's love?

Nicole reflected that in relating what she had seen to the baron, she would fall into a great error, — first, because he would only laugh at the affair, box Gilbert's ears, and turn him out of doors; next, because it would deprive her of her power over Gilbert and Andrée. What

pleasure she should have — she, the waiting-maid — in seeing them turn pale or red as her eye fell on them! This idea flattered her pride and soothed her vindictive spirit; and at this idea her reflections ceased, she slept.

It was day when she awoke, fresh, light-hearted, and her mind prepared for everything. She took her usual time to dress, — that is, an hour. She looked at herself in the piece of broken glass which served as her mirror. Her eyes appeared to her more brilliant than ever; her lips had not lost their brightness nor their roundness; her teeth were perfect; her neck, which she took particular care to hide from the sun, was white as a lily. Seeing herself so handsome, she began to think she could easily make her young lady jealous. Thus armed personally and mentally, she opened Andrée's door, as she was authorized to do whenever, at seven o'clock, her mistress had not rung for her.

When Nicole entered the room she stopped in amazement. Pale, her beautiful hair damp with perspiration, Andrée lay on her bed in a heavy sleep, in which she sometimes writhed as if in pain. She was still in the dress which she had worn the day before. Her breathing was hurried, and now and then a low groan escaped her lips. Nicole looked at her for a minute, then shook her head; for she acknowledged to herself that there could be no beauty which could contest the palm with Andrée's.

She went to the window and opened the shutters. A stream of light poured in, and made Mademoiselle de Taverney's violet-veined eyelids quiver. She awoke and tried to rise, but felt such weakness and pain that she fell back on her pillow with a cry of suffering.

"Oh, Mademoiselle! what is the matter?" asked Nicole.

"Is it late?" said Andrée, rubbing her eyes.

"Very late; Mademoiselle has remained in bed an hour longer than usual."

"I do not know what is the matter with me, Nicole," said Andrée, looking around her; "I feel so oppressed, so ill!"

Nicole fixed her eyes on her mistress before replying: "It is the commencement of a cold that Mademoiselle caught last night."

"Last night!" replied Andrée, surprised; then, looking at her disordered dress, "Have I really lain down without undressing? How could that be?"

"If Mademoiselle would recollect —"

"I recollect nothing," replied Andrée, leaning her head on her hand. "What has happened? Am I going mad?" She sat up on the bed, and looked round for the second time, all bewildered. Then, after reflecting: "Oh! yes, I remember I was very tired, very much exhausted yesterday, — it was the storm, no doubt; then I fell asleep on the music-stool at my harpsichord. But after that I remember nothing. I must have come up to my room half-asleep, and thrown myself on my bed without strength to undress."

"You should have called me," said Nicole; "Mademoiselle knows that I am always ready to wait on her."

"I either did not think of it or had not strength to do it."

"Hypocrite!" muttered Nicole to herself. Then she added: "But Mademoiselle must have stayed very late at her harpsichord, then, for before she came up to her room, hearing a noise, I went down —" She stopped, hoping to discover in Andrée something like agitation, — a blush, perhaps. No. Andrée was calm, and her countenance, that clear mirror of her soul, was undisturbed. "I went down —" repeated Nicole.

"Well?"

"Well, Mademoiselle, you were not at your harpsichord."

Andrée looked up, but there was only surprise to be read in her lovely eyes. "Very strange!" said she.

"It is quite true, however."

"You say I was not in the salon? But I never left it for a moment till I came to bed."

"Mademoiselle will pardon me for contradicting her."

"But where was I, then?"

"Mademoiselle must know that better than I," said Nicole, shrugging her shoulders.

"You must be wrong, Nicole," said Andrée, mildly; "I only remember feeling cold and stiff, and having great difficulty in walking."

"Oh! but when I saw Mademoiselle, she walked very well," said Nicole, almost with a sneer.

"You saw me walk?"

"Yes, indeed."

"But just now you said I was not in the salon?"

"It was not in the salon I saw Mademoiselle."

"Where, then?"

"In the vestibule, near the staircase."

"You saw me?"

"Yes; I think I ought to know Mademoiselle when I see her," said Nicole, with an affected laugh.

"I am certain, however," said Andrée, with great simplicity, after she had again tried to recall the events of the night, "that I did not stir out of the salon."

"I am, however, quite as certain that I saw Mademoiselle in the vestibule. I thought, indeed, she had just come in from a walk in the garden. It was a beautiful night after the storm, and it is very pleasant to walk out when the air is so cool, and when the flowers smell so sweet, is it not, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, but you know I dare not walk out at night! I am too timid."

"Mademoiselle might have some one with her, and then she would not be afraid."

"And whom could I have with me?" asked Andrée, without the least suspicion that she was undergoing a cross-examination.

Nicole was afraid to proceed further in her investigation. Andrée's coolness she thought the height of dissimulation; but she judged it best to give the conversation another turn.

"Mademoiselle was saying that she felt in pain?"

"Yes, indeed, I feel in great pain, and so weak, so low. I did nothing yesterday but what I do every day, yet I am so tired; perhaps I am going to be ill."

"It may be some sorrow which causes that feeling of weariness; I have felt it myself."

"Oh! you have sorrows, have you, Nicole?"

This was said with a disdainful carelessness which gave Nicole courage to speak more plainly.

"Oh, yes, Mademoiselle!" she replied; "yes, I have."

Andrée got out of bed slowly; and while proceeding to undress, that she might dress again, she said, "Well, let me hear them."

"Indeed, I have just come to tell Mademoiselle—" She stopped.

"To tell what? You look frightened, Nicole."

"I look frightened, and Mademoiselle looks tired; so doubtless we are both suffering."

This piece of familiarity displeased Andrée. She frowned slightly, exclaiming, "Oh!"

The intonation of her voice might have made Nicole reflect; but she was not to be daunted. "Since Mademoiselle wishes me to speak, I shall do so," she said.

"Well, go on."

"I wish to get married, Mademoiselle."

"Oh! is that what you are thinking of? Why, you are not seventeen yet."

"Mademoiselle is only sixteen, and yet does she not sometimes think of marrying?"

"What reason have you to suppose so?" asked Andrée, severely.

Nicole was just opening her mouth to say something impertinent; but she knew that that would cut short the conversation, which she had no desire should end yet.

"I beg Mademoiselle's pardon, — I cannot certainly know her thoughts. I am but a country girl, — I follow nature."

"That is a strange expression!"

"Is it not natural for a woman to love, and to wish to be loved?"

"Perhaps so. Well?"

"Well; I am in love."

"And the person you love loves you?"

"I think so, Mademoiselle." Then, reflecting that this reply was not decided enough under the circumstances, she added, "Indeed, I am sure of it."

"You are not wasting your time at Taverney, from your own account, Mademoiselle Nicole!"

"One must think of the future, Mademoiselle. You are a lady, and doubtless some rich relation will leave you a fortune; I must do the best I can for myself."

All this appeared natural enough; and forgetting Nicole's little piece of impertinence, Andrée's goodness of heart began to resume the ascendency.

"Very true," said she; "but I should like to know who is your choice."

"Ah, you do know him, Mademoiselle!" said Nicole, fixing her eyes on Andrée.

"I know him?"

"Yes, very well."

"Who is it, then? Do not keep me in suspense."

"I am afraid Mademoiselle will be displeased."

"I displeased?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Then it is some improper person whom you have chosen?"

"I do not say that."

"Then tell it without fear. It is the duty of masters to take an interest in the welfare of their dependents who perform their duties satisfactorily; and you know I am satisfied with you."

"You are very kind, Mademoiselle."

"Well, tell me quickly, and finish lacing me."

Nicole collected all her firmness and all her powers of penetration as she said, "Well, Mademoiselle, it is Gilbert whom I have chosen."

To her great surprise Andrée betrayed no emotion of any kind; she only said, "What! little Gilbert, my nurse's son?"

"It is he, Mademoiselle."

"And he loves you?"

Nicole believed that the decisive moment had arrived. "He has told me so twenty times," she said.

"Well, marry him," said Andrée, calmly. "I see nothing to prevent it. You have no relations, — he is an orphan; you are each of you free from control."

"Certainly," stammered Nicole, quite amazed at the matter ending so differently from what she had expected. "Mademoiselle gives her permission, then?"

"My full permission, — only you are both very young yet."

"We shall live longer together."

"And you have neither of you any money."

"We shall work."

"What can he work at, — he who is such a good-for-nothing?"

This dissimulation was too much for Nicole. She could not contain herself. "Mademoiselle must allow me to say that in speaking so of poor Gilbert she is treating him very ill," she said.

"It is treating him as he deserves; he is a lazy fellow."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, he reads a great deal; he wishes so to be well-informed!"

"He will not work."

"For Mademoiselle he does all that he can."

"For me?"

"Mademoiselle must know that, since she orders him to procure game for her every day, and he does so."

"I order him?"

"Yes; and he often goes twenty miles for it."

"Indeed! I confess I never thought about it."

"About the game?" asked Nicole, sarcastically.

"What does that witticism mean?" asked Andrée, getting a little impatient, for she felt irritable and unwell.

"I have no wit, Mademoiselle; wit is for great ladies. I am a poor girl, and tell things plainly as they are," replied Nicole; "and Mademoiselle is unjust to Gilbert, who is so very attentive to all her wishes."

"He only does his duty as a servant, if he be so."

"But Gilbert is not a servant, Mademoiselle; he receives no wages."

"He is the son of an old tenant; he is kept, he is fed, and he does nothing in return. But why defend so warmly this lad when he was not attacked?"

"Oh! I knew very well that Mademoiselle would not attack him."

"More words that I do not understand!"

"Mademoiselle will not understand."

"Enough! Explain this moment what you mean."

"Mademoiselle certainly knows better than I what I mean."

"I know nothing, and I shall not take the trouble of finding out; you ask my consent to your marriage?"

"Yes, and I would beg of you, Mademoiselle, not to be angry with Gilbert for loving me."

"What can it matter to me whether he loves you or does not love you? You are really very tiresome."

"Perhaps Mademoiselle has said the same to Gilbert?" said the waiting-maid.

"I!—do I ever speak to your Gilbert? You are crazy, I think."

"If Mademoiselle does not speak to him now, it is not very long since she did speak to him."

Andrée turned on her a look of ineffable scorn. "You have been trying for an hour to let me hear some specimen of your impertinence; say it at once, I command you."

"But—" began Nicole, a little alarmed.

"You say that I have spoken to Gilbert?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I say so!"

A thought flashed across Andrée's mind, but it was so absurd that she burst into a fit of laughter. "Heaven forgive me!" she exclaimed; "I do believe the poor girl is jealous. Be not uneasy, Legay; I know so little of your Gilbert that I do not even know the color of his eyes!" And Andrée felt quite prepared to pardon what she now thought not impertinence, but mere folly. But Nicole did not want to be pardoned, because she looked on herself as the injured person.

"It is not the way to know their color to look at them by night," said she.

"Did you speak?" asked Andrée, now beginning to understand, but scarcely willing to allow herself to entertain the thought.

"I said that if Mademoiselle only speaks to Gilbert at night, she will not see very well what his features are."

"Take care!" said Andrée, turning pale, "and explain instantly what you mean."

"That is easily done. Last night I saw —"

"Be silent; some one calls me!"

In fact, a voice just then called, from the court in front of the house, "Andrée! Andrée!"

"It is the baron, Mademoiselle," said Nicole, "with the strange gentleman."

"Go down, and say that I cannot appear, — that I am indisposed; and then return and let me know the end of this extraordinary story of yours."

"Andrée!" cried her father again, "it is only the Baron Balsamo, who wishes to bid you good-morning and inquire after your health."

"Go, I tell you," said she to Nicole; and she pointed to the door with the gesture of a queen.

But when Nicole was gone, Andrée felt a strange sensation; she had resolved not to appear, yet she was impelled by an irresistible power to the window left open by her waiting-maid. She saw Balsamo below; he bowed, at the same time fixing his eyes steadily on her. She trembled, and held by the window to keep herself from falling.

"Good-morning, Monsieur," said she, in reply to his salutation; and just as she pronounced the words, Nicole, whom she had sent to say she should not appear, advanced

toward the gentlemen, looking with open mouth at this instance of caprice in her mistress.

Andrée had scarcely spoken when she sank, deprived of strength, on a chair; Balsamo still continued to gaze on her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MORNING.

The traveller had risen early, in order to look after his carriage and ascertain how Althotas had got on. No one was up at that hour in the castle but Gilbert, who followed with his eyes every movement of the stranger. But he could discover little, as Balsamo closed the carriage-door too carefully for his inquisitive looks to penetrate its mystery.

Seeing the baron's abode by the clear light of a sunny morning, Balsamo was struck by the change which the light of day had made in a picture which the night before had seemed to him very gloomy. The little white and red château — for it was built of stone and brick — was surrounded by a grove of sycamores and laburnums of a large size, the flowers of which hung on the roof of the low building and girt the towers with a crown of gold. In front of the court there was a small piece of water, surrounded by a broad border of turf and a hedge of acacias, on which the eye rested with pleasure, confined as the view was on this side by the tall chestnut and ash trees of the avenue.

Balsamo turned along a broad walk on the left, and had scarcely advanced twenty paces when he found himself in the midst of a thick shrubbery of maples, palms, and lindens, among which the roses and syringas, steeped by the rain of the preceding night, sent forth a delicious perfume. Through the hedge of privet which bordered

the walk peeped jasmine and honeysuckle, and in the distance could be seen a long alley, lined with pink hawthorn and wild roses, leading to a wood.

Balsamo at last arrived at the extremity of the demesne. Here, on a slight elevation, stood the massive ruins of an ancient castle, one of the towers of which was still standing almost uninjured, and clothed from its base to its summit with luxuriant shoots of the ivy and wild vine. Viewed from this point, the demesne of Taverney, though but seven or eight acres in extent, wanted neither dignity nor elegance.

After having spent about an hour in examining the ruins, Balsamo was returning toward the house, when he saw the baron leave it by a side-door, his slight frame buried in an Indian flowered dressing-gown, and proceed to prune and arrange his little parterre. He hastened to meet him; and now having still further sounded the poverty of his host, his politeness was more decided in its expression than it had been the night before.

"Allow me, Monsieur," said he, "to offer you my excuses for the trouble I have given you, and at the same time my respectful thanks for your hospitality. I should not have ventured to come down before knowing that you were up; but the view of Taverney from my window was so charming that I could not resist my desire to revisit those imposing ruins, and to see your beautiful garden."

"The ruins," said the baron, after having politely wished the stranger good-morning, "the ruins, Monsieur, are fine, — indeed, the only thing that is fine at Taverney."

"It was a large castle!"

"Yes; it was mine, or rather my ancestors'. They called it Maison Rouge, which name has long been joined

to Taverney, — indeed, our barony is that of Maison Rouge. But, my dear guest, let us not talk of things no longer in being."

Balsamo bowed in acquiescence.

"Allow me rather to make my excuses to you for your poor accommodation here. I told you beforehand what my house was."

"I have been delighted with it."

"A dog-kennel, a dog-kennel, Monsieur! A very favorite place with the rats, since the foxes, lizards, and adders drove them from the other castle. Ah, *pardieu!* Monsieur, you, who are a sorcerer or something very near it, you certainly ought to raise up with a stroke of your wand the old castle in its glory again, — not forgetting the two thousand acres which formerly surrounded it. I'll wager, however, that instead of thinking of doing me such a service, you have been so polite as to go to sleep in an execrable bed!"

"Oh, Monsieur!"

"No, no; don't attempt to say anything in its favor! It is an execrable bed, — it is my son's."

"You must permit me to say that, such as the bed is, it appeared to me excellent. I cannot but feel ashamed of having intruded on you, and I am deeply indebted for the kindness with which you have received me. It would give me sincere pleasure to make a return, if it were in my power."

"Well, there is an opportunity," replied the old man, with a mocking smile; and pointing to La Brie, who was coming with a glass of water on a splendid plate of Dresden china, "just turn this into Burgundy, Chambertin, or any other good wine, and you will do me a most important service."

Balsamo smiled; the old man took the smile for a

refusal, and at one draught swallowed the water presented to him.

"An excellent specific!" said Balsamo. "Water is highest among the elements, for the Holy Spirit was borne on it before the creation of the world. Nothing can resist its action, — it penetrates stone; and we may yet discover that the diamond can be dissolved by it."

"I shall be dissolved by it, I fear," replied the baron. "Will you pledge me? The water has some advantages over my wine, — it is in capital order, and it is not yet exhausted. It is not like my Maraschino."

"If you had ordered a glass for me as well as for yourself, I might have been able to use it for your advantage."

"Good; explain that for me. Is there not still time?"

"Oh, yes! Tell your servant to bring me a glass of very pure water."

"La Brie, do you hear, you old rascal?"

La Brie hastened to obey.

"How," said the baron, turning to his guest, "can the glass of water which I drink every morning contain any properties or secrets which are unknown to me? Have I for ten years been making chemical experiments, as Monsieur Jourdain made prose, without being aware of it?"

"I do not know what you have been doing, but you shall see what I can do. Thank you, my good fellow," said Balsamo, taking the glass from La Brie, who had brought it with marvellous rapidity. He held the glass on a level with his eyes, and seemed to interrogate the water which it contained; in the sunlight the little beads on its surface were bright as diamonds, and streaked with violet color.

"Oh, the deuce!" cried the baron, laughing; "can anything beautiful be seen in a glass of water?"

"Yes, Baron, to-day, at least, something very beautiful." And Balsamo appeared doubly attentive in his occupation, — the baron, in spite of himself, looking a little serious, and La Brie gazing with open mouth at what was going on.

"What do you see? I am bursting with impatience to know. A good estate for me? A new Maison Rouge to set me on foot again?"

"I see something which induces me to beg you to be on the alert."

"Really! Am I going to be attacked?"

"No; but this morning you will receive a visit."

"Then you have yourself ordered some one to meet you here. That was wrong, Monsieur, very wrong. There may be no partridges this morning, — remember that!"

"I speak seriously, my dear Baron, and what I say is most important. Some one is at this moment on the way to Taverney."

"By what unhappy chance, *mon Dieu!* and what sort of visitor? Tell me, I beseech you, my dear guest; for I confess (you must have perceived it from the rather sour reception I gave you) that every one annoys me who comes here. Be precise, my dear sorcerer; if possible, be precise in your description."

"I can very easily tell all you wish;" and Balsamo again raised the glass to his searching eye.

"Well, do you see anything?"

"I see everything distinctly."

"Speak, oh speak, Sister Anne!"

"I see a lady of great consequence coming."

"Bah! indeed! — coming without being invited?"

"She has invited herself; she is attended by your son."

"By Philippe?"

"Yes."

The baron was seized with a fit of laughter very uncomplimentary to the sorcerer. "Ah! ah!" he said, "attended by my son? You say that the visitor is attended by my son?"

"Yes, Baron."

"You know my son, then?"

"I never saw him in my life."

"And my son at this moment is —"

"Is about a mile off."

"My dear Monsieur, he is in garrison at Strasburg; and unless he has deserted, — which he has not, I can swear, — he is bringing nobody hither."

"He is bringing some one, nevertheless," said Balsamo, still consulting his glass of water.

"And that some one," asked the baron, — "is it a man, or a woman?"

"It is a lady, Baron, and one of very high rank. Ah! there is one thing I ought to tell you, — you had better keep out of sight that little rogue with the horn at her finger-ends."

"Why so?"

"Because her features resemble those of the lady who is coming."

"A great lady resembles Nicole? That is absurd!"

"Why not? I bought a slave once who resembled Cleopatra so much that there was some idea of sending her to Rome to pass for that queen in Octavius's triumph."

"Ah, another attack of your old malady!"

"Well, do as you please about what I have told you. You must surely see, my dear Baron, that this matter cannot concern me; I speak only for your own good."

"But why should Nicole's resemblance to the great lady offend her?"

"Suppose you were the king of France (which I am far from wishing), or the dauphin (which I wish still less), should you be flattered on entering a house to find among the servants one whose face was a counterpart of your august visage?"

"Oh, the devil! that would be a sad dilemma! So, then, you think —"

"I think that the most high and mighty lady who is coming would not be pleased to see her living image in a short petticoat and cotton handkerchief."

"Oh, well," said the baron, still laughing, "we must see about it! But after all, my dear Baron, what delights me most in this affair is that my son is coming, — that dear Philippe, — without giving us a note of warning!" and he laughed louder than before.

"So you are pleased with my prediction?" said Balsamo, gravely. "I am glad of it; but in your place I should set about giving some orders."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"I shall think of it, my dear guest; I shall think of it."

"You have very little time."

"And you are serious, then?"

"No one could be more serious. If you wish to receive properly the great personage who does you the honor of visiting you, you have not a minute to lose."

The baron shook his head.

"You still doubt?" asked Balsamo.

"Faith! I confess, dear guest, that you have to do with a most confirmed sceptic." And just then he turned to call his daughter, in order to communicate his guest's prediction to her, as we have before related. We have seen how the young girl replied to her father's invitation,

and how Balsamo's gaze had drawn her, as if by fascination, to the window.

Nicole stood looking with amazement at La Brie, who was making signs to her, and trying to understand what had been said.

"It is devilishly hard to believe!" repeated the baron, "and without seeing —"

"Then, since you must see, look there!" said Balsamo, pointing to the avenue, where a horseman appeared galloping toward them.

"Ha!" cried the baron, "there indeed is —"

"Monsieur Philippe!" said Nicole, standing on tiptoe.

"My young master!" exclaimed La Brie, joyfully.

"My brother, my brother!" cried Andrée, stretching out her arms at the window.

"Is it your son, my dear Baron?" asked Balsamo, in a careless tone.

"Yes, *pardieu*, it is!" he exclaimed, stupefied with astonishment.

"This is but the beginning," said Balsamo.

"You are positively a sorcerer, then?" said the baron.

A triumphant smile hovered on the stranger's lips.

The horse came on at full speed, reeking with moisture, passed the last rows of trees, and was still in motion when the rider leaped to the ground and hastened to embrace his father, who only muttered, "What the devil! what the devil!"

"It is really I," said Philippe, who saw his father's perplexity; "it is indeed."

"Doubtless, — I see that plainly enough; but what brought you hither at this time?"

"Father, a great honor awaits our house!"

The old man looked up inquiringly.

Philippe went on: "In an hour Marie Antoinette

Josephe, Archduchess of Austria and Dauphiness of France, will be here."

The baron looked as deeply humbled as he had before looked sarcastic; and turning to Balsamo, said only, "Pardon me!"

"Monsieur," returned Balsamo, "I leave you with your son; it is long since you have met, and you must have much to say to each other."

Bowing to Andrée, who, full of joy at the arrival of her brother, had hastened down to meet him, he retired, making a sign to Nicole and La Brie, which they doubtless understood, for they disappeared with him among the trees of the avenue.

CHAPTER XIII.

PHILIPPE DE TAVERNEY.

PHILIPPE DE TAVERNEY, Chevalier de Maison Rouge, did not resemble his sister, yet was as fine a specimen of manly beauty as she was of feminine loveliness. His features were noble and regular, his figure and carriage graceful in the extreme, and the expression of his eyes was at the same time mild and haughty.

Like all distinguished minds, burdened by the conditions of life imposed on them, he was disposed to sadness, without being gloomy. To this perhaps he owed his mildness of temper; for he was naturally proud, imperious, and reserved. The necessity of associating with the poor, his real equals, as with the rich, his equals in rank, had softened a character inclined to be overbearing and scornful.

Philippe had scarcely embraced his father when Andrée, roused from her magnetic torpor by his arrival, hastened down to throw herself on his bosom. The sobs which accompanied this action showed how dear he was to the heart of the tender girl. Philippe took her hand and his father's and drew them into the salon, where they could be alone. "You are incredulous, my dear father, — you are surprised, my dear sister," said he, after seating them near him; "yet nothing is more true than that in a few minutes the dauphiness will be in our poor abode."

"*Ventrebleu!*" cried the baron, "she must be prevented, whatever it may cost! The dauphiness here, — we should

be dishonored forever! This would be a specimen of the nobility of France to present her! No, no; it must not be. But tell me, what the deuce put my house into her head?"

"Oh, it is a complete romance!"

"A romance!" said Andrée. "Relate it, brother, my dear, good brother!"

"'My dear, good brother!'" repeated the baron, — "she seems quite pleased!"

"Yes; for is not Philippe pleased, my dear father?"

"Because master Philippe is an enthusiast. But for me, who look at things in a more serious manner, I see nothing very agreeable in it."

"You will be of a different opinion," said the young man, "when I relate what has occurred."

"Well, relate it quickly!" grumbled the baron.

"Yes, yes; relate it, Philippe!" exclaimed Andrée.

"Well, I was in garrison at Strasburg, as you know. Now, you are aware that it was by Strasburg that the dauphiness was to enter France."

"Know it! how should we know anything in this den?" asked the baron.

"Well, at Strasburg, brother?" said Andrée.

"Well, we were waiting on the glacis from six in the morning, for we did not know positively at what hour Madame la Dauphine would arrive. It rained in torrents, and our clothes were dripping. The major sent me forward to endeavor to discover the cortège. I had galloped about a league, when all at once, at a turn in the road, I found myself close to the advanced guard of the escort. I exchanged a few words with them, and just then her Royal Highness put her head out of the carriage-window and asked who I was. It seemed that some one called to me to stop; but being eager to carry the news to the

officer who had sent me, I had already set off at full gallop. All my fatigue was forgotten in an instant."

"And the dauphiness?" asked Andrée.

"She is not older than you, and beautiful as an angel."

"But, Philippe —" said the baron, rather hesitatingly.

"Well, father?"

"Does she not resemble some one you have seen?"

"Some one that I have seen?"

"Yes; endeavor to recollect."

"No, I know no one like Madame la Dauphine!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"What! not Nicole, for instance?"

"Ha, that is strange!" cried Philippe, in surprise. "Now you say so, I do think she is like her; but oh, so much inferior in beauty and grace! But how could you know that she was like her?"

"Faith! a sorcerer told me."

"A sorcerer?" said Philippe, astonished.

"Yes; and he predicted her coming and yours this morning."

"The stranger?" asked Andrée, timidly.

"Is it he who was beside you, Monsieur, when I arrived, and who retired so discreetly?"

"Yes; but go on, Philippe, go on."

"Perhaps it would be better to make some preparations," said Andrée.

"No, —the more you prepare, the more ridiculous we shall appear. Go on, Philippe, I tell you!"

"I returned to Strasburg and made my report. Word was sent to the governor, the Comte de Stainville, who immediately joined us. We set out to meet her Royal Highness, and we were at the Kehl gate when the procession came in sight. I was close to the governor."

"Stay!" said the baron; "I once knew a Comte de Stainville."

"Brother-in-law to the prime minister, the Duc de Choiseul."

"It is the same. Go on, then, go on."

"The dauphiness, who is young, perhaps likes young faces; for she listened very inattentively to the governor, and fixed her eyes on me, although I kept respectfully in the background. Then, pointing to me, she said, 'Is not that the gentleman who was the first to meet me?' 'Yes, Madame,' replied the governor. 'Approach, Monsieur,' said she. I approached her. 'What is your name?' asked the dauphiness, in the sweetest voice I ever heard. 'The Chevalier de Taverney Maison Rouge,' I replied, stammering. 'Pray take a note of that name on your tablets, my dear friend,' said the dauphiness, turning to an old lady, who, I have since learned, is the Comtesse de Langershausen, her governess. My name was written. Then, turning again to me, she said, 'Ah, Monsieur, you have suffered very much from your exposure to this frightful weather! I am extremely sorry for having been the cause of it.'"

"Oh, how good the dauphiness must be! What kindness and consideration!" said Andrée, with delight.

"Very well, very well indeed," muttered the baron, with a smile indicating a father's partiality, and at the same time his bad opinion of women, even of queens. "But go on, Philippe."

"What did you reply?" asked Andrée.

"I replied not a word; I bowed to the very ground. She passed on."

"What, you made no reply?" exclaimed the baron.

"I had no voice, I assure you, Monsieur; my heart beat so rapidly, — I was so much agitated."

"What the devil! do you think I had nothing to say when, at about your age, I was presented to the Princess Leczinska?"

"But, Monsieur, you had always a great deal of wit," Philippe replied, bowing.

Andrée pressed his hand.

"I profited by her Royal Highness's departure," continued Philippe, "to hasten to my apartment and change my clothes; for I was wet to the skin, and covered with mud from head to foot."

"Poor brother!" whispered Andrée.

"When the dauphiness," Philippe continued, "reached the town-hall, she had to receive the congratulations of the principal inhabitants; that being over, it was announced that dinner was ready. A friend of mine, the major of my regiment, has since told me that while at table she looked several times round on the officers who were present, and at last she said, 'I do not see the young officer who was sent to meet me this morning; has he not been told that I wished to thank him?' The major stepped forward. 'Madame,' said he, 'Lieutenant de Taverney was obliged to retire and change his dress, that he might present himself in a more suitable manner before you.' A moment after, I entered the room, and I had not been there five minutes when the dauphiness perceived me. She made a sign to me to approach; I obeyed. 'Monsieur,' said she, 'would you object to follow me to Paris?' 'Oh, Madame,' I cried, 'it would only make me too happy; but I am in garrison at Strasburg, and am not my own master.' 'Well, I shall arrange that matter with the governor;' and she made a gesture for me to retire. In the evening she said to the governor, 'Monsieur, I have a vow to fulfil, and you must assist me in it.' 'I shall consider it a sacred duty,

Madame,' he replied. 'You must know,' she continued, 'that I made a vow to take into my own service the first Frenchman, whoever he should be, whom I should meet on touching the soil of France, and that I would make him and his family happy, — if, indeed, princes can make any one happy.' 'Madame,' said the governor, 'princes are God's representatives on earth. But may I ask,' continued he, 'who was the person who had the good fortune to be first met by your Royal Highness?' 'The Chevalier de Taverney Maison Rouge, a young lieutenant.' 'We shall all be jealous of the Chevalier de Taverney, Madame,' replied the governor, 'but we shall not place any obstacle in the way of his high fortune; the ties which engage him here shall be broken, and he shall depart at the same time as your Highness.' So the day on which the dauphiness left Strasburg I was ordered to accompany her on horseback, and since then have never left the door of her carriage."

"Oh!" said the baron, with his former singular smile, "strange enough, but not impossible!"

"What, father?" said the young man, naïvely.

"Oh, I know!" said the baron; "I know, eh! eh!"

"But, brother," said Andrée, "I don't see what all this has to do with the visit of the dauphiness."

"Wait till you hear. Last night we arrived at Nancy at about eleven o'clock, and were passing through the town by torch-light. The dauphiness called me to her. 'Monsieur de Taverney,' she said, 'urge on the escort.' I made a sign that the dauphiness wished to travel faster. 'I wish,' she added, 'to depart early to-morrow morning.' 'Your Highness is going to make a long march, then?' 'No, but I wish to stop on the road; and can you guess where?' she asked, smiling. 'No, Madame.' 'I mean to stop at Taverney, to see your

father and sister.' 'My father and my sister! What, your Royal Highness knows —' 'I have made inquiries, and know that they live only two hundred paces from the road which we are travelling. You will give the order to make a halt at Taverney.' The perspiration broke on my forehead, and, trembling, as you may suppose, I hastened to reply, 'My father's house, Madame, is not worthy to receive so great a princess; we are poor.' 'So much the better,' she replied; 'I shall therefore, I am certain, be received more cordially and more simply, — however poor you may be, there will be always a cup of milk for a friend who wishes to forget for a moment that she is Archduchess of Austria and Dauphiness of France.' 'O Madame!' said I. That was all I could say; respect forbade me to go farther."

"Stupid fellow!" cried the baron.

"One might have thought that her Royal Highness understood what was in my mind; for she added: 'Do not be afraid, I shall not stay long. But if, as you think, I should suffer some inconvenience by this visit, that would be only fair; for I caused you to suffer on my arrival at Strasburg.' Who could resist such charming words, father?"

"Oh, it would have been impossible," cried Andrée; "she is so sweet, so good! She will be satisfied with my flowers and a cup of my milk, as she says."

"Yes," said the baron; "but she will not be very well satisfied with my chairs, which will dislocate her bones, and my hangings, which will disgust her. Devil take all whims! So! France will be well governed by a woman who takes such caprices. *Peste!* This is ominous of a strange reign."

"Oh, father, how can you say such things of a princess who is honoring us so highly?"

"Who is dishonoring us, rather!" cried the old man. "Taverney was forgotten, buried under the ruins of Maison Rouge. I intended that if it came to light again, it should be in a suitable manner; and now the whims of a girl are going to drag us into day, — dusty, shabby, wretched! Now the gazettes, on the watch for everything absurd, will amuse their readers with the visit of a great princess to this den of Taverney. *Cordieu* I have an idea!"

The young people started at the manner in which he pronounced these words. "What do you mean, Monsieur?" asked Philippe.

The baron muttered to himself: "If the Count of Medina burned his palace that he might embrace a queen I may well burn my kennel to get rid of the visit of a princess. Let her come! let her come!"

Philippe and Andrée heard only the last words, and they looked at each other uneasily.

"It cannot be long before she will be here, Monsieur," said Philippe. "I took the way through the wood, in order to get some minutes in advance of the cortège; but it will soon be here."

"Then I must not lose time," said the baron; and, with the agility of youth, he left the salon, ran to the kitchen, snatched a flaming piece of wood from the hearth, and hurried to his barns. But just as he was about to throw the burning brand into a heap of straw, his arm was seized by Balsamo.

"What are you about, Monsieur?" cried he. "The Archduchess of Austria is not a Constable de Bourbon, whose presence contaminates so that we should rather burn our house than permit her to enter it!"

The old man stopped, pale, trembling, and his habitual smile banished from his lips. He had gathered all his

strength into his resolution to make his poverty yet greater by the destruction of his dwelling, rather than be disgraced — according to his ideas — by allowing its mediocrity to be seen.

"Come, Monsieur, come," continued Balsamo; "you have only time to throw off your dressing-gown and put yourself in better trim. The Baron of Taverney whom I knew at the siege of Philipsbourg, wore the grand cross of the order of Saint Louis. Any coat will be rich and elegant when decorated with that."

"But, Monsieur, shall I show to our dauphiness that poverty which I wished to hide even from you?"

"Be not uneasy, Baron; we shall manage to occupy her attention so that she shall not know whether your house be new or old, poor or rich. Be hospitable, Monsieur; it is your duty as a gentleman! What will the enemies of the dauphiness do — and she has many — if her friends burn their castles rather than receive her under their roof? Let us not thus anticipate that vengeance which is to come! Everything in its predestined time."

The baron again showed an involuntary submission to Balsamo, and hurried to his children, who, uneasy at his absence, were seeking him on every side. As to Balsamo, he retired in silence, like a man intent on some work which he had undertaken, and which he must complete.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARIE ANTOINETTE JOSEPHE, ARCHDUCHESS OF AUSTRIA.

As Balsamo had said, there was no time to be lost; for now on the road, generally so peaceful, which led to the Baron of Taverney's dwelling, a great sound of carriages, horses, and voices was heard. Three carriages, one of which was covered with gilding and mythological bas-reliefs, and, notwithstanding its magnificence, was not less soiled and bespattered than the others, stopped at the great gate of the avenue. Gilbert held open the gate, his eyes distended, his whole frame trembling with feverish agitation at the sight of so much magnificence. Twenty gentlemen on horseback, all young and splendidly dressed, drew up near the principal carriage, from which a young girl of sixteen, dressed with great simp licity, but with her hair elaborately piled on her forehead, got out, assisted by a gentleman in black, who wore, saltier-wise, under his mantle, the ribbon of Saint Louis.

Marie Antoinette — for it was she — brought with her a reputation for beauty which the princesses destined to share the thrones of the kings of France have not always possessed. It was difficult to say whether her eyes were beautiful or not; yet they were capable of every expression, more particularly of the opposite expressions of mildness and scorn. Her nose was finely formed, her upper lip beautiful; but the lower lip — her aristocratic inheritance from seventeen emperors — was too thick and promi-

nent. Her complexion was lovely; her neck, shoulders, and bust were of marble whiteness and beautifully formed; her hands truly regal. At times, when she was roused to energy, her carriage was majestic, firm, and decided; at other times soft, undulating, — one might almost say caressing. No woman ever made a reverence more gracefully; no queen ever gave greeting with more tact and discrimination. This day the most expressive sweetness shone in her countenance. She had resolved to be only the woman, and to forget the dauphiness. She wore a dress of white silk, and her beautiful bare arms supported a mantle of rich lace. Scarcely had she touched the ground when she turned to assist one of her ladies of honor, whom age had weakened a little; and refusing the arm of the gentleman in black, she advanced, inhaling the fresh air, and looking around as if determined to enjoy to the utmost the few moments of freedom with which she was indulging herself. "Oh! what a beautiful situation," she exclaimed; "what magnificent trees! And such a pretty little house! How happy one might be in this healthful air, under those trees, which make so sweet a retirement!"

At this moment Philippe appeared, followed by Andrée, on whose arm the baron leaned. She was dressed in a simple gown of gray silk, and the baron in a coat of blue velvet, the remains of some of his old magnificence; he had not forgotten Balsamo's recommendation, and wore his ribbon of Saint Louis. On seeing the three approach, the dauphiness stopped. Her escort then grouped itself around her, — the officers holding their horses by the bridles, and the courtiers, hat in hand, whispering to one another.

Philippe drew near, pale with agitation, yet with a noble bearing. "With your Royal Highness's permis-

sion," said he, "I have the honor of presenting to you the Baron de Taverney Maison Rouge, my father, and Claire Andrée de Taverney, my sister."

The baron bowed profoundly, like a man who knew how to bow to queens. Andrée showed in her graceful timidity the flattering politeness of sincere respect. Marie Antoinette looked at the two young persons; and recalling what Philippe had said of their poverty, she understood what they suffered at that moment.

"Madame," said the baron, with dignity, "your Royal Highness does too much honor to the château of Taverney; such an obscure abode is not worthy to receive so much rank and beauty."

"I know that it is the abode of an old soldier of France," replied the dauphiness; "and my mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, who has often made war, has told me that in your country those richest in glory are sometimes the poorest in meaner treasures;" and with ineffable grace she extended her lovely hand to Andrée, who, kneeling, kissed it.

The baron was, however, still haunted by the idea which had so much tormented him, that the attendants of the dauphiness were about to crowd into his little house, in which there could not be found chairs for a fourth of their number. The dauphiness hastened to relieve him from his embarrassment. "Gentlemen," said she, turning to those who formed her escort, "I must not impose on you the trouble of following me in all my caprices. You will wait here, if you please; in half an hour I shall return. Come with me, my good Langershausen," she added in German to the lady whom she had assisted out of the carriage; "and you, Monsieur," said she to the gentleman in black, "have the goodness to follow us!"

This personage, who, though dressed simply, was re

markable for the elegance of his manners, was about thirty years of age and very handsome. He drew to one side to allow the princess to pass. Marie Antoinette took Andrée for her guide, and made a sign to Philippe to come near his sister. As to the baron, he was left to the personage, of high rank doubtless, to whom the dauphiness had granted the honor of accompanying her.

"So you are a Taverney Maison Rouge?" said the stranger, playing with his splendid ruffles of the most expensive lace, and turning to the baron with aristocratic impertinence.

"Must I reply 'Monsieur,' or 'Monseigneur?'" asked the baron, with equal impertinence.

"You may say simply 'Prince,' or 'your Eminence,' which you choose," the other replied.

"Well, then, your Eminence, I am a Taverney Maison Rouge, — a real one!" said the baron, in that tone of raillery which he so seldom abandoned.

His Eminence, who had the usual tact of great nobles, felt that he had to do with no country clown, and continued, "This is your summer residence?"

"Summer and winter," answered the baron, who wished to put an end to disagreeable queries, but accompanying each reply with a low bow.

Philippe could not help turning from time to time uneasily toward his father, for the house as they drew nearer it, wore an aspect threatening and ironical, as if pitilessly determined to show all their poverty. The baron had already resignedly extended his hand to point the way to the door of his house, when the dauphiness, turning to him, said, "Excuse me, Monsieur, if I do not enter; these shades are so delightful that I could pass my life in them. I am tired of rooms. For fifteen days I have been received in rooms, — I, who love the open air, the shade of trees,

and the perfume of flowers." Then, turning to Andrée, "You will bring me a cup of milk here, under these beautiful trees, will you not?"

"Your Highness," said the baron, turning pale, "how should we dare to offer you such poor refreshment?"

"I prefer it, Monsieur, to anything else. New-laid eggs and milk formed my banquets at Schönbrunn."

All at once La Brie, swelling with pride, in a splendid livery and with a napkin on his arm, appeared under an archway of jasmine, the shade of which had attracted the eye of the dauphiness. In a tone in which importance and respect were strangely mixed, he announced, "Her Royal Highness is served!"

"Am I in the dwelling of an enchanter?" cried the princess, as she ran rather than walked to the perfumed alley.

The baron, in his uneasiness, forgot all etiquette, left the gentleman in black, and hurried after the dauphiness. Andrée and Philippe looked at one another with mingled astonishment and anxiety, and followed their father.

Under the clematis, jasmine, and woodbine was placed an oval table, covered with a damask cloth of dazzling whiteness, on which was arranged, in a brilliant service of plate, a collation the most elegant and rare. There were exotic fruits made into the most delicious confections, biscuits from Aleppo, oranges from Malta, and lemons of extraordinary size, all arranged in beautiful vases. Wines, the richest and most esteemed, sparkled like the ruby and the topaz in decanters ornamented and cut in Persia; and in the centre, in a silver vase, was placed the milk for which the dauphiness had asked.

Marie Antoinette looked around and saw surprise and alarm imprinted on the face of her host and on the countenances of his son and daughter. The gentlemen of her

escort was delighted with what they saw, without understanding it, and without endeavoring to understand it.

"You expected me, then, Monsieur?" said she to the baron.

"I, Madame!" stammered he.

"Yes; you could not in ten minutes have all this prepared, and I have been only ten minutes here;" and she looked at La Brie with an expression which said, "especially when you have only one servant!"

"Madame," answered the baron, "your Royal Highness was expected, or rather your coming was foretold to me."

"Your son wrote to you?"

"No, Madame."

"No one knew that I was coming here, as I did not wish to give you the trouble which I see I have occasioned. It was only late last night that I expressed my intention to your son, and he reached this place only a few minutes before me."

"Scarcely a quarter of an hour, Madame."

"Then some fairy must have revealed to you what was to occur,— Mademoiselle's godmother, perhaps?"

"Madame," said the baron, offering a chair to the princess, "it is not a fairy who announced my good fortune to me; it is —"

"It is —?" repeated the princess, observing that he hesitated.

"An enchanter, Madame!"

"An enchanter! How can that be?"

"I know nothing of the matter, for I do not meddle with magic myself; yet it is to him, Madame, I am indebted for being able to entertain your Highness in a le fashion."

n we must not touch anything, since the collation

is the work of sorcery. His Eminence," she added, pointing to the gentleman in black, whose attention was fixed on a Strasburg pie, "seems in a hurry to begin; but we shall assuredly not eat of this enchanted collation. And you, dear friend," turning to her governess, "distrust the Cyprus wine, and do as I do!" and she poured some water from a globe-formed carafe with a narrow neck into a golden goblet.

"In truth," said Andrée, with alarm, "her Royal Highness is perhaps right!"

Philippe trembled with surprise, and ignorant of what had taken place the evening before, looked alternately at his father and his sister for explanation.

"But I see," continued the dauphiness, "his Eminence is determined to sin, in spite of all the canons of the Church."

"Madame," replied the prelate, "we princes of the Church are too worldly to believe that celestial wrath can be aroused by the food we eat, and certainly too humane to burn an honest sorcerer for providing us with good things like these!"

"Do not jest, Monseigneur," said the baron. "I swear to you that the contriver of all this is a sorcerer, — a real sorcerer, — who foretold to me, about an hour ago, the arrival of her Royal Highness and my son!"

"And has an hour been sufficient for you to prepare this banquet?" demanded the dauphiness. "In that case you are a greater sorcerer than your sorcerer!"

"No, Madame, it is he who did all this; he brought the table up through the ground, laden as you see."

"On your word, Monsieur?"

"On the honor of a gentleman!" replied the baron.

"Ha!" said the cardinal, in a serious tone, putting back the plate which he had taken, "I thought you

were jesting. Then you have in your house a real magician?"

"A real magician! And I should not wonder if he has made all the gold on that table himself."

"Oh, he must have found out the philosopher's stone!" cried the cardinal, his eyes sparkling with covetousness.

"See how the eyes of his Eminence sparkle! He has been seeking all his life for the philosopher's stone!" said the dauphiness.

"I confess to your Royal Highness," replied his very worldly Eminence, "that nothing interests me more than the supernatural; nothing is so curious, in my estimation, as the impossible."

"Ah! I have touched the vulnerable part, it seems," said the dauphiness. "Every great man has his mysteries, particularly when he is a diplomatist; and I — I warn your Eminence — know a great deal of sorcery. I sometimes find out things, if not impossible, if not supernatural, at least incredible;" and the eye of the dauphiness, before so mild, flashed as from an internal storm, but no thunder followed. His Eminence doubtless understood what this meant, for he was evidently embarrassed. The dauphiness continued: "To make the thing complete, M. de Taverney, you must show us your magician. Where is he? In what box have you hidden him?"

"Madame," answered the baron, "he is much more able to put me and my house in a box than I to put him!"

"In truth, you excite my curiosity," said Marie Antoinette. "Positively, Monsieur, I must see him!"

The tone in which this was uttered, although still retaining the charm which Marie Antoinette knew how to give to her words, forbade all idea of refusal to comply

with her wish. The baron understood this perfectly, and made a sign to La Brie, who was contemplating with eager eyes the illustrious guests, the sight of whom seemed to make up to him for his twenty years of unpaid wages.

"Tell Baron Joseph Balsamo," said his master, "that her Royal Highness the dauphiness desires to see him." La Brie departed.

"Joseph Balsamo!" said the dauphiness. "What a singular name!"

"Joseph Balsamo!" repeated his Eminence, as if reflecting; "I think I know that name."

Five minutes passed in silence. Suddenly Andrée shuddered; she heard, before it was perceptible to other ears, a step advancing under the shade of the trees. The branches were put aside, and Joseph Balsamo stood face to face with Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER XV.

MAGIC.

Balsamo bowed humbly; but no sooner had he raised his head than he fixed his bright, expressive eyes firmly but respectfully on the face of the dauphiness, and waited calmly until she should interrogate him.

"If it is you of whom the Baron de Taverney has been speaking to us," said Marie Antoinette, "draw near, Monsieur, that we may better see what a magician is."

Balsamo advanced another step and bowed.

"Your profession is to foretell events, Monsieur?" said the dauphiness, regarding him with more curiosity than she would herself have been willing to acknowledge, and sipping some milk which had been handed her.

"It is not my profession, Madame," said Balsamo, "but I do foretell events."

"We have been brought up in an enlightened creed," said the dauphiness, "and the only mysteries in which we believe are those of the Catholic faith."

"They are to be venerated," replied Balsamo, reverently; "but here is Monseigneur the Cardinal de Rohan, who will tell your Royal Highness, though he be a prince of the Church, that they are not the only mysteries which deserve to be regarded with respect."

The cardinal started; he had not told his name, it had not been pronounced, yet this stranger knew it. Marie Antoinette did not appear to remark this circumstance, but continued: "You will confess, Monsieur, that at

least they are the only mysteries which cannot be controverted?"

"Madame," answered Balsamo, with the same respect, "besides faith, there is certainty."

"You speak rather obscurely, Monsieur. Although thoroughly French in heart, I am but indifferently acquainted with the niceties of the language, and must beg you to be less enigmatic if I am to comprehend you."

"And I, Madame," said Balsamo, shaking his head, with a melancholy smile, "would entreat that all may remain unexplained. I should deeply regret to unveil to so illustrious a princess a future which might not correspond to her hopes."

"This becomes serious," said Marie Antoinette; "the gentleman wishes to excite my curiosity, that I may command him to tell my fortune."

"God forbid that your Royal Highness should force me to do it!" said Balsamo, coldly.

"Yes," replied the dauphiness; "for you would be rather puzzled to do it!" and she laughed.

But the dauphiness's laugh died away without meeting an echo from any of the attendants. They all seemed to submit tacitly to the influence of the singular man who was for the moment the centre of general attraction.

"Come, confess it frankly," said the dauphiness.

Balsamo bowed without answering.

"Yet it is you who predicted my arrival to the Baron de Taverney," resumed Marie Antoinette, with a slight movement of impatience.

"Yes, Madame, it is I."

"And how did he do it?" she added, turning to the baron, as if she felt the necessity that a third party should intervene in this strange dialogue.

"Very simply, Madame, — merely by looking in a glass of water."

"Is that true?" she asked, turning to Balsamo.

"Yes, Madame," he replied.

"Then, having read the future for the Baron de Taverney in a glass of water, surely you can read it for me in a decanter."

"Perfectly well, Madame."

"And why refuse to do so?"

"Because the future is uncertain; and if I saw a cloud on it —" He stopped.

"Well?"

"It would give me pain, as I have had the honor to say already, to sadden your Royal Highness."

"Have you known me before, or do you now see me for the first time?"

"I have had the honor of seeing your Royal Highness when a child, in your native country, with your august mother."

"You have seen my mother, then?"

"I have had that honor. She is a great and powerful queen."

"Empress, Monsieur."

"I used the word 'queen' in reference to the heart and mind; and yet —"

"Reservations concerning my mother?" said the dauphiness, haughtily.

"The greatest hearts have weaknesses, Madame, particularly where they think the happiness of their children is concerned."

"History, I trust, Monsieur, will not discover a single weakness in Maria Theresa."

"Because history will not know what is known only to the Empress Maria Theresa, to your Royal Highness, and to myself."

"We have a secret, Monsieur, — we three?" said the dauphiness, smiling disdainfully.

"We three, Madame," replied Balsamo, solemnly.

"Come, then, tell this secret, Monsieur."

"It will then be one no longer."

"No matter; tell it!"

"Is it your Royal Highness's will?"

"It is."

Balsamo bowed. "There is in the Palace of Schönbrunn," said he, "a cabinet, called the Dresden cabinet, on account of the splendid vases of porcelain which it contains."

"Yes," said the dauphiness; "go on."

"This cabinet forms a part of the private suite of rooms of the Empress Maria Theresa; in it she writes her letters."

"Yes."

"On a certain day, about seven in the morning, when the empress had not yet risen, your Royal Highness entered this cabinet by a door through which you alone were permitted to pass; for your Highness is the favorite daughter of her Imperial Majesty."

"Well, Monsieur?"

"Your Highness approached a writing-desk, on which lay open a letter which her Imperial Majesty had written the night before. Your Royal Highness read that letter; and doubtless some expressions in it were displeasing to you, for you took a pen, and with your own hand erased three words."

The dauphiness blushed slightly. "What were the words erased?" she asked anxiously.

"They were the first words of the letter."

"I do not ask you where they were to be found, but what was their meaning."

"A too strong expression of affection, doubtless, for the person to whom they were addressed. This was a weakness, and to this it was I alluded in speaking of your august mother."

"Then you remember the words?"

"Assuredly."

"Repeat them to me."

"They were: '*My dear friend.*'"

Marie Antoinette bit her lip and turned pale.

"Shall I tell your Royal Highness to whom the letter was addressed?"

"No; but you may write the name."

Balsamo drew out a pocket-book with gold clasps; and having written some words on one of the leaves, he tore it out, and, bowing, presented it to the dauphiness. Marie Antoinette unfolded the leaf and read, "The letter was addressed to the mistress of Louis XV.: 'To the Marquise de Pompadour.'" The dauphiness raised her eyes and looked with astonishment at the man who, though he bowed low before her, seemed to have it in his power to direct her fate. "All this is true, Monsieur," she said, after a pause; "and although I am ignorant by what means you have become acquainted with these circumstances, I cannot speak falsely, and I must declare that what you have said is true."

"Then," said Balsamo, "will your Royal Highness permit me to retire, satisfied with this harmless proof of my art?"

"No, Monsieur," replied the dauphiness; "the more I know of your powers, the more desirous I become to have my fate foretold. You have spoken only of the past; let me learn what the future will be."

The princess spoke these words with a feverish impatience which she in vain endeavored to conceal from her *auditors.*

"I am ready, if your Royal Highness commands me, to declare it; yet let me supplicate you not to do so."

"I have never expressed a command twice; and you will recollect, Monsieur, that I have already commanded once."

"Let me at least ask the oracle if the revelation may be made to your Royal Highness," he said, entreatingly.

"Good or bad, Monsieur," replied Marie Antoinette, with increasing irritation, "I will know it. If good, I shall take it for flattery; if bad, I shall hold it as a warning, and shall be obliged to you for it. Begin!"

Balsamo took the round carafe with the narrow neck and placed it on a golden saucer; the rays of the sun, striking on this, shone dimly yellow in the water, and seemed to offer something worthy of deep consideration to the attentive soothsayer. Every one was silent. At length he placed the carafe again on the table, and shook his head.

"Well, Monsieur?" said the dauphiness.

"I cannot speak it," replied Balsamo.

"You cannot, because you have nothing to tell me," replied Marie Antoinette, a little contemptuously.

"There are things which must never be said to princes, Madame," replied Balsamo, in a tone which seemed to express his determination to oppose her wishes.

"Yes, when those things, I repeat, may be expressed by the word *nothing*."

"It is not that which prevents me, Madame; on the contrary, it is the very reverse."

The dauphiness smiled disdainfully, Balsamo appeared embarrassed, the cardinal began to laugh outright, and the baron drew near, grumbling: "So my magician has exhausted himself! His powers have not lasted very long! It only remains for us to see all these fine things

turned into vine-leaves, as we have read in Eastern tales."

"I should rather have had the simple vine-leaves," said Marie Antoinette, "than these fine things displayed by the gentleman for the purpose of getting himself presented to me."

"Deign to remember, Madame," replied Balsamo, who was deadly pale, "that I did not solicit this honor."

"It was not difficult for you to anticipate, Monsieur, that I should ask to see you."

"Pardon him, Madame," said Andrée, in a low voice; "he thought he was doing right."

"And I tell you he was doing wrong," replied the princess, so as to be heard only by Andrée and Balsamo. "No one can elevate himself by humiliating an old man; and when we can have the pewter goblet of a gentleman to drink in, we need not the golden one of a mountebank!"

Balsamo started as if a viper had bitten him. "Madame," said he, greatly agitated, "I am ready to let you know your destiny, since your blindness impels you to desire such knowledge."

He pronounced these words in a tone so firm and so threatening that all who heard him felt the blood chilled in their veins.

"Gib ihm kein Gehör, meine Tochter,"[1] said the old lady to Marie Antoinette.

"Lass sie hören; sie hat wissen wollen, und so soll sie wissen,"[2] replied Balsamo.

These words, spoken in German, — a language which was understood by only a few present, — seemed to render more mysterious what was going on.

[1] Do not listen to him, my daughter.

[2] Let her; she wishes to know, and she shall know.

"No," said the dauphiness, resisting the entreaties of her venerable governess; "let him say what he desires to say. Were I now to permit him to be silent, he would believe me afraid."

Balsamo heard these words, and a dark, furtive smile played for a second on his lips. "It is as I said," he muttered to himself; "the courage of bravado merely."

"Speak!" said the dauphiness; "speak, Monsieur!"

"Then your Royal Highness is decided?"

"I never go back from a decision once made."

"In that case, Madame, I would entreat that we may be alone."

She made a sign which those around understood; all retired.

"This is a good way to obtain a private audience," said the dauphiness, turning to Balsamo; "is it not, Monsieur?"

"I would beg your Royal Highness not to irritate me!" replied Balsamo; "I am but an instrument of Providence to enlighten you on those sorrows which await you. Insult Fortune, if you will, — she can revenge herself; but for me, I am but the gloomy herald of the misfortunes she has in store for you."

"Then it appears that misfortunes await me?" said the dauphiness, mildly, touched by Balsamo's respectful manner.

"Yes, Madame, very great misfortunes!"

"First, will my family be happy?"

"That which you have left, or that to which you are going?"

"Oh, my own family, — my mother, my brother Joseph, my sister Caroline!"

"Your misfortunes will not reach them."

"They are mine alone, then?"

"They are yours, and those of your new family."

"The royal family of France includes three princes, — the Duc de Berry, the Comte de Provence, and the Comte d'Artois: what will be their fate?"

"They will all reign."

"Then I shall have no children?"

"You will have children."

"Not sons?"

"Some of them sons."

"My sorrows, then, will be caused by their death?"

"You will grieve because one of them dies, but most will you grieve because the other survives."

"Will my husband love me?"

"Yes, too well."

"Shall I not, then, be able to bear my grief, supported by my husband and my family?"

"Neither will support you."

"The love of my people will still be mine?"

"The people! — the ocean in a calm! — have you seen the ocean in a storm, Madame?"

"By doing good I shall prevent the storm; or, if it rise, I shall rise with it!"

"The higher the wave, the deeper the abyss."

"God will defend me."

"Alas! there are heads which he himself foredooms!"

"What mean you, Monsieur? Shall I not, then, be queen?"

"Yes, Madame; but would to Heaven that you were not to be!"

She smiled disdainfully.

"Did you remark," he continued, "the tapestry of the first room in which you slept after having entered France?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the dauphiness, shuddering.

"What did it represent?"

"The slaughter of the Innocents."

"Have not the grim faces of the murderers haunted your memory?"

"I confess that they have."

"Had you not a storm on the way hither?"

"Yes; a thunderbolt fell, and nearly on my carriage."

"Were not those omens?"

"Omens of sinister import?"

"It would be difficult, it seems to me, to interpret them otherwise."

The dauphiness let her head fall on her bosom, and raising it after a minute's silence, "Speak!" said she; "in what manner shall I die?"

He shook his head.

"Speak!"

"I dare not."

"It is my will that you should," she said, imperiously.

"Have mercy, have mercy on yourself!"

"Speak, Monsieur, or I shall say that all this is but an absurd fable. Take care! the daughter of Maria Theresa is not to be jested with, — the woman who holds in her hand the destiny of thirty millions of men."

He continued silent.

"You know no more," she said, contemptuously; "or rather, your imagination is exhausted."

"My knowledge of the future is not exhausted, Madame; and if you will force me — "

"Yes, I will hear all."

He seized the carafe on the golden saucer, placed it in a dark hollow, where some rocks formed a sort of grotto; then he took the hand of the archduchess, and drew her under the vault. "Are you ready?" he asked the princess, who was alarmed by his rapid movements.

"Yes."

"On your knees, then! on your knees! and pray to God to spare you the dreadful end of all your greatness, which you are now to witness!"

She obeyed mechanically, and fell on her knees. He pointed with a wand to the glass globe, in the centre of which must have appeared some dark and terrible form, for the dauphiness, in trying to rise, trembled, and sank again to the ground with a shriek of horror; she had fainted.

The baron hastened to her assistance, and in a few minutes she came to herself. She put her hand to her forehead, as if to recall her thoughts; then suddenly exclaimed, with indescribable terror, "The carafe! the carafe!"

The baron presented it to her. The water was perfectly limpid, not a stain mingled with it. Balsamo had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BARON DE TAVERNEY THINKS HE SEES AT LAST A SMALL OPENING INTO THE FUTURE.

THE baron was the first to perceive that the dauphiness had fainted; he had kept on the watch, more uneasy than any one else at what might take place between her and the sorcerer. Hearing her cry of terror, and seeing Balsamo spring out of the grotto, he ran to the spot.

The dauphiness's first request was to see the carafe; her second that no injury should be done the magician. It was well that she made this request, for no sooner had Philippe heard her cry than he bounded after him like an angry lion. Her lady of honor came near, and questioned her in German; but to all questions she replied only that Balsamo had in no way been wanting in respect to her, — that she thought the storm of the preceding night, and her long journey, had fatigued her and brought on a nervous attack. Her replies were translated to the Cardinal de Rohan, who stood by, but dared not himself ask for information. In courts, people are obliged to be satisfied with half answers; what the dauphiness said satisfied no one, though every one appeared to be satisfied. Philippe then drew near and said: "I am obliged to obey your Royal Highness's orders, yet it is with regret that I do so; the half-hour during which you intended to stay is past, and the horses are ready."

"Thanks, Monsieur," said she, with a smile full of fascinating languor; "but I must alter my determination. I

do not feel able to set out just now. If I could rest for a few hours, I should be quite restored."

The baron turned pale; Andrée looked at him anxiously. "Your Royal Highness knows what a poor abode ours is," the baron stammered out.

"Oh, Monsieur, any place will do; a little rest is all I want!" She said this as if again fainting, and her head sank again on her bosom.

Andrée went to prepare her room for her; and having in a few minutes returned, she stood beside the dauphiness, not daring to speak until some indication was given that she might do so. At length Marie Antoinette raised her head, smiled to Andrée, and with her hand made a sign to her to draw nearer.

"The room is ready for your Royal Highness; we entreat only —"

But she was not permitted to finish her apology; the dauphiness interrupted her. "Many thanks, Mademoiselle," she said. "May I ask you to summon the Countess of Langershausen, and to lead us to the apartment?"

Andrée obeyed; the old lady-of-honor hurriedly approached. "Give me your arm, my dear friend," said the dauphiness to her in German, "for indeed I have scarcely strength enough to walk without support."

The baroness obeyed; Andrée started to assist.

"Do you understand German, then, Mademoiselle?" asked Marie Antoinette.

"Yes, Madame; I even speak it a little," replied Andrée, in German.

"That is delightful!" exclaimed the dauphiness; "that agrees well with my plans."

Andrée dared not ask her august guest what her plans were, although she longed to know them. The dauphiness leaned on the arm of the Comtesse de Langershausen,

and advanced slowly, her limbs trembling under her. As she issued from the trees in front of the grotto, she heard the cardinal's voice.

"What!" said he, "Comte de Stainville, do you insist on speaking to her Royal Highness, notwithstanding her orders to the contrary?"

"I must insist on doing so," replied the governor of Strasburg, in a firm voice; "her Royal Highness will pardon me, I am certain."

"Really, Monsieur, I do not know that I ought —"

"Let the governor come forward," said the dauphiness, appearing at the opening of the trees, which formed a verdant arch above her head. "Approach, Monsieur de Stainville."

Every one bowed at her command, and drew back to allow free passage to the brother-in-law of the then all-powerful minister who governed France. The count looked around as if to request a private audience. Marie Antoinette understood that he had something important to say to her, but before she could express a wish to be left alone, all had withdrawn.

"A despatch from Versailles, Madame," said the count in a low voice, and presenting a letter which he had kept concealed under his plumed hat.

The dauphiness took it, and read the address. "It is for you, Monsieur, not for me," she said; "open it and read it to me, if, indeed, it contains anything of interest to me."

"The letter is addressed to me," he replied, "but in the corner is a mark agreed on between my brother, M. de Choiseul, and myself, indicating that the letter is for your Royal Highness."

"Ah! that is true, — a cross; I did not observe it. Give me the letter."

She opened the letter, and read the following lines: "The presentation of Madame Dubarry is decided on, if she can only procure some noble lady to present her. We still hope she may not find one; but the only sure means to prevent the presentation will be for her Royal Highness the dauphiness to make all speed. Her Royal Highness once at Versailles, no one will dare to offer such an insult to the court."

"Very well," said the dauphiness, folding up the letter, without showing any sign of emotion, or even of interest.

"Will your Royal Highness now retire to repose a little?" asked Andrée, timidly.

"No, I thank you, Mademoiselle; the air has revived me, I have quite recovered." Abandoning the arm of her lady-of-honor, she walked forward firmly and rapidly. "My horses immediately!" said she.

The cardinal looked with inquisitive surprise at the count.

"The dauphin is becoming impatient," whispered the latter; and this falsehood appearing a secret confided to him alone, his Eminence was satisfied. As to Andrée, her father had taught her to respect the whims of crowned heads, and she was not at all surprised at the change in Marie Antoinette's intentions. The latter, therefore, turning, and seeing no alteration in the sweet expression of her countenance, said: "Thanks, Mademoiselle; your hospitable reception has made a deep impression on me." Then, turning to the baron, she continued: "Monsieur, you must know that on leaving Vienna I made a vow to advance the fortune of the first Frenchman whom I should meet on the frontiers of France. That Frenchman was your son. But I do not intend to stop there; your daughter shall not be forgotten either."

"Oh, your Highness!" murmured Andrée.

"Yes, I mean to make you one of my maids-of-honor. You are noble, are you not?" she added, again addressing the baron.

"Oh, your Highness!" cried the baron, with delight, for all his dreams seemed realized by what he heard, "although poor, our descent is unblemished; yet so high an honor—"

"It is only due to you. Your son will defend the king in the army; your daughter will serve the dauphiness at home: the one you will inspire with every loyal sentiment, the other with every virtuous one. Shall I not be faithfully served, Monsieur?" she said, turning to Philippe, who knelt in gratitude at her feet, without words to express his emotion.

"But—" murmured the baron; for his feelings did not prevent him from reflecting.

"Yes, I understand," said the dauphiness; "you have preparations to make; yet they cannot require much time."

A sad smile passed over the lips of Andrée and Philippe, a bitter one over those of the baron; and Marie Antoinette stopped, for she felt that she might unintentionally have wounded their pride.

"At least," she resumed, "if I may judge by your desire to please me. Besides, I shall leave you one of my carriages; it will bring you after us. I must call the Comte de Stainville to my aid."

The count approached.

"I shall leave one of my carriages for the Baron de Taverney, whom I wish to accompany me to Paris with his daughter. Appoint some one to accompany their carriage and to cause it to be recognized as belonging to my suite."

"Immediately, Madame," replied the governor. "Come forward, Monsieur de Beausire!"

A young man, of about five and twenty years of age, with an easy and graceful carriage, and a lively and intelligent eye, advanced, hat in hand, from the ranks of the escort of the dauphiness.

"Let one of the carriages remain behind," said the count, "for the Baron de Taverney; you will accompany the carriage yourself."

"And, Monsieur," said the dauphiness, "join us again as soon as possible. I authorize you to have double relays of horses, if necessary."

The baron and his children were profuse in their acknowledgments.

"This sudden departure will not put you to much inconvenience, I hope, Monsieur," said the dauphiness.

"We are too happy to obey your Royal Highness's orders," replied the baron.

"Adieu! adieu!" said she, with a smile. "Gentlemen, conduct me to my carriage. Monsieur Philippe, to horse!"

Philippe kissed his father's hand, embraced his sister, and leaped lightly into his saddle.

The glittering train swept on, and in a quarter of an hour had disappeared like an evening vapor; there remained no human being in the avenue of Taverney but a young man, who, sitting on one of the low pillars of the gate, pale and sorrowful, followed with a longing eye the last cloud of dust which was raised by the horses' feet, and which served to show the road they had taken. The young man was Gilbert.

Meantime the salon of Taverney presented a singular scene. Andrée, with clasped hands, reflected on the unexpected and extraordinary event which had so suddenly interrupted the course of her calm life, and she believed herself in a dream. The baron was pulling some hairs,

which were rather too long, out of his gray eyebrows, and adjusting the bosom of his shirt. Nicole, leaning against the door, looked at her master and mistress, and La Brie, with his arms hanging down and his mouth open, looked at Nicole.

The baron was the first to rouse himself from his revery. "Scoundrel!" cried he to La Brie, "are you standing there like a statue, and that gentleman, an officer of the king's household, waiting without?"

La Brie made a bound toward the door, knocked one leg against the other, and disappeared, staggering. In a short time he returned. "Monsieur," he said, "the gentleman is below."

"What is he doing?"

"Making his horse eat the pimpernels."

"Leave him alone, then. And the carriage?"

"It is in the avenue."

"The horses harnessed?"

"Yes, Monsieur, — four horses; such beautiful animals! They are eating the pomegranates."

"The king's horses have a right to eat whatever they like. By the by, the sorcerer?"

"The sorcerer, Monsieur, has disappeared."

"And has left all the plate on the table? It is not possible. He will return, or will send some one for it."

"I don't think he will, Monsieur. Gilbert saw him set out with his wagon."

"Gilbert saw him set out with his wagon?" the baron repeated, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"That wretch Gilbert sees everything! Go and pack my trunk."

"It is packed, Monsieur."

"What! — it is packed?"

"Yes; as soon as I heard what her Royal Highness the dauphiness said, I went into your room and packed your clothes and linen."

"Who told you to do so, you officious rascal?"

"Indeed, Monsieur, I thought I was only anticipating your orders."

"Fool! Go, then, and help my daughter."

"Thank you, father; but I have Nicole."

The baron began to reflect again.

"But, triple blockhead," he said to La Brie, "it is impossible."

"What is impossible, Monsieur?"

"What you have not thought of, for you think of nothing."

"But what is it, Monsieur?"

"That her Royal Highness would go without leaving something with Monsieur de Beausire, or the sorcerer without leaving a message with Gilbert."

At this moment a low whistle was heard from the courtyard.

"What is that?"

"It is a call for me, Monsieur," replied La Brie.

"And who calls?"

"The gentleman, Monsieur."

"The gentleman left by the dauphiness?"

"Yes, Monsieur. And here is Gilbert coming as if he had something to say to you."

"Go, then, stupid animal!"

La Brie obeyed with his usual alacrity.

"Father," said Andrée, approaching him, "I know what troubles you. Recollect, I have thirty louis-d'or, and that beautiful watch set with diamonds which Queen Leczinska gave my mother."

"Yes, my dear, yes!" replied the baron; "but keep

them, keep them. You must have a handsome dress for your presentation. Meantime it is for me to provide resources. Hush! here is La Brie."

"Monsieur," cried La Brie as he came in, holding in one hand a letter, and in the other some money, "see what the dauphiness left for me, — ten louis-d'or, Monsieur! ten louis-d'or!"

"And that letter, rascal?"

"Oh! the letter is for you, Monsieur, — from the sorcerer."

"From the sorcerer? Who gave it you?"

"Gilbert, Monsieur."

"I could have told you so, stupid animal! Give it me, give it me!"

He snatched the letter, tore it open, and read these words: —

MONSIEUR LE BARON, — Since a hand so august has touched the plate I left with you, it belongs to you; keep it as a relic, and remember sometimes your grateful guest,

JOSEPH BALSAMO.

"La Brie!" cried the baron, after a moment's reflection, "is there not a good goldsmith at Bar-le-Duc?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur! the one who soldered Mademoiselle Andrée's silver brooch."

"Very well! Andrée, lay aside the goblet out of which her Royal Highness drank, and let the rest of the service be put up in the carriage with us. And you, beast that you are, help the gentleman outside to a glass of what remains of our good wine."

"One bottle, Monsieur," said La Brie, with deep melancholy.

"That is enough."

"Now, Andrée," said the baron, taking both his

daughter's hands, "courage, my child! We are going to court; there are plenty of titles there without possessors; there are rich abbeys to give, — regiments without colonels; there are pensions waiting. It is a fine country, the court; the sun shines brightly there. Put yourself always in its rays, my child; for you are worthy to be seen. Go, my love, go!"

Andrée went out, followed by Nicole.

"Holloa! La Brie, you monster!" cried the baron, "attend to the gentleman, I tell you!"

"Yes, Monsieur," answered La Brie, from a distant part of the cellar.

"I," continued the baron, going toward his room, "must go and arrange my papers. We must be out of this hole in an hour. Do you hear, Andrée? And we are leaving it in good style too! What a capital fellow that sorcerer is! I am becoming as superstitious as the devil! But make haste, La Brie, you wretch!"

"I was obliged to go feeling about, Monsieur, in the cellar; there is not a candle in the house."

"It was time to leave it, it appears," said the baron.

CHAPTER XVII.

NICOLE'S TWENTY-FIVE LOUIS-D'OR.

In the mean time Andrée made active preparations for her departure, and Nicole assisted her with an ardor which quickly dissipated the little cloud that had arisen between them in the morning.

"She is a good girl," said Andrée to herself, "devoted and grateful; she has faults, but what human creature has not? Let me forget them."

Nicole was not slow to observe the expression of her mistress's face. "Fool that I was!" said she to herself, "I was nearly quarrelling with my young lady, and all about that good-for-nothing Gilbert! And she is going to Paris, and will take me with her! One is sure of making one's fortune in Paris."

Andrée was the first to speak. "Put my lace in a bandbox," said she.

"What bandbox, Mademoiselle?"

"How should I know? We have one, have we not?"

"Oh, yes! the one you gave me; it is in my room;" and Nicole ran to bring it, with an obliging air which disposed Andrée still more in her favor.

"But this bandbox is your own," said Andrée, when Nicole reappeared with the article in her hand, "and you may want it yourself, poor child."

"Oh! you have more need of it, Mademoiselle; and besides, it is yours."

"When people get married and set up housekeeping, they require many little things; so just now you have most need of the box. Keep it to put your bridal finery in."

"Oh, Mademoiselle," said Nicole, gayly, shaking her head, "my finery will not take up much room!"

"But if you marry, Nicole, I should wish you to be happy, — even rich."

"Rich?"

"Yes, rich according to your rank."

"Then you have found some farmer-general for me, Mademoiselle?"

"No; but I have found a dowry."

"Indeed, Mademoiselle?"

"You know what is in my purse?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, — twenty-five shining louis-d'or."

"They are yours, Nicole."

"Twenty-five louis-d'or!" cried Nicole, with rapture; "it is indeed a fortune!"

"My poor girl, I am glad you think so!"

"And you really give them to me, Mademoiselle?"

"I wish I could give you more."

Nicole felt surprised, moved; the tears came to her eyes. She seized her young lady's hand and kissed it.

"Do you think your husband will be pleased?"

"Oh, much pleased!" said Nicole, — "at least, I hope so."

She reflected that Gilbert had doubtless refused her hand through fear of poverty; and that since she had now become rich, she perhaps would appear more desirable to the ambitious young man. Then she determined immediately to offer him a share of her young lady's generous gift, and to attach him to herself by gratitude. *Such* was Nicole's generous plan. Andrée looked at her

as she reflected. "Poor girl," sighed she, "may she be happy in her simple life!"

Nicole heard the words and started from her revery. They opened to her fancy a whole Eldorado of silks, diamonds, lace, and love, — things of which Andrée had not thought. But she turned away her eyes from the gold and purple cloud brightening her horizon, and resisted the temptation. "After all, Mademoiselle," said she, "I shall be happy here, in a quiet way."

"Reflect seriously, my child."

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I shall reflect."

"That is right. Make yourself happy in the way you propose if you can; but do not be foolish."

"You are very kind, Mademoiselle. And let me say now that I was very foolish this morning; but I hope Mademoiselle will forgive me. When one is in love —"

"Then you are really in love with Gilbert?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle; I — I loved him," said Nicole.

"Is it possible?" said Andrée, smiling. "What can you see to admire in the young man? The first time I meet him I must take a look at this M. Gilbert who steals young girls' hearts."

"Is he not going with us to Paris, Mademoiselle?" inquired Nicole, who wished to be fully informed on every point before taking the step she meditated.

"Of what use would he be there? He is not a domestic, and could not take charge of a house in Paris. Idle people at Taverney live like the birds; however poor the soil, it feeds them. But in Paris an idle person would cost too much; we could not support him."

"But if I marry him?" stammered Nicole.

"Well, if you marry him, you shall live here with him at Taverney. You shall take care of this house which my mother loved so much."

It was impossible for Nicole to suspect any mystery or reservation in these words. She heard Andrée renounce Gilbert without hesitation or a shadow of regret. Yet she paused before speaking again. Andrée, noticing her silence, thought that her mind was in doubt between the pleasures of a Parisian life and those of the quiet country. She continued, in a gentle but firm tone: "Nicole, the decision which you are now to make will affect all your future life. Reflect, my child. You have an hour for your deliberation. It is but a short time; you, however, are prompt in your decisions, and I think it will be sufficient to enable you to choose between my service and marriage, — between me and Gilbert."

"An hour? Oh, yes, Mademoiselle, I can decide in an hour!"

"Collect all my clothes and my mother's, — I would not leave behind those relics so dear to me, — then go, and return in an hour fully decided. But whatever your determination be, here are your twenty-five louis-d'or. If you marry, they shall be your dowry; if you continue in my service, your wages for two years."

Nicole took the purse from Andrée's hands and kissed it. Doubtless she was unwilling to lose a second of the hour which her mistress had granted her, for she darted out of the chamber, went rapidly downstairs, crossed the court-yard, and entered the avenue.

Andrée saw her as she went, and murmured, "Poor fool, to be so happy! Is love, then, so sweet?"

Five minutes later, still that she might lose no time, doubtless, Nicole knocked on the window of a room on the ground-floor occupied by Gilbert, — the idler, according to Andrée, the good-for-nothing, according to the baron. Gilbert was bustling about with his back to the window; but at the sound of the knocking he turned, and

like a thief caught in the fact, he quickly abandoned his occupation.

"Oh! is it you, Nicole?" said he.

"Yes, it is," she replied, smiling, but with an air of decision.

"You are welcome," said he, coming forward and opening the window.

Nicole felt that there was kindness in his reception of her, and held out her hand. Gilbert grasped it. "This is a good beginning," thought she; "farewell my journey to Paris!" and to Nicole's praise, it must be said, she did not sigh at this thought.

"You know," said the young girl, leaning her elbows on the window, "you know, Gilbert, that the family are leaving Taverney?"

"Yes, I know."

"Do you know where they are going?"

"They are going to Paris."

"And do you know that I am going too?"

"No, I did not know it."

"Well?"

"Well! I congratulate you if you are pleased at going."

"How you say that!"

"I say it plainly, I think, — if you are pleased at going."

"My being pleased depends —"

"Why do you stop? depends —?"

"My being pleased or not depends on you."

"I don't understand you," said Gilbert, seating himself on the window so that his knees touched Nicole's arm, and they could thus converse unseen and unheard.

Nicole looked at him tenderly; he shook his head, insinuating that he understood her look no more than her words.

"Well," said she, "since I must tell you everything, listen to what I am going to say."

"I hear you," replied Gilbert, coldly.

"Mademoiselle offers to take me to Paris with her —"

"Very well; go on!"

"Unless —"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I get married here."

"Then you still think of getting married?" he answered, quite unmoved.

"Yes, more particularly since I have become rich."

"Oh! you have become rich?' he asked, so phlegmatically that Nicole knew not what to think.

"Very rich, Gilbert!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And how did that miracle come about?"

"Mademoiselle has given me a marriage portion."

"You are very fortunate. I congratulate you, Nicole."

"Look!" said she, pouring out of the purse into her hand the twenty-five louis-d'or, and watching Gilbert's eyes to discover some ray of pleasure or at least of covetousness in them.

Gilbert moved not a muscle. "On my word, it is a nice little sum!" said he.

"And that is not all," continued Nicole. "The baron will be rich once more; the old castle will be rebuilt, and the care of it given —"

"To the fortunate husband of Nicole," said Gilbert, with an irony not so well concealed but that it grated on Nicole's fine ear; yet she restrained her anger.

"And Nicole's husband — is he not some one whom you know, Gilbert?"

"Of whom are you speaking, Nicole?"

"Have you, then, grown stupid, or do I no longer speak French?" cried the young girl, who began to be impatient.

"I understand you perfectly," replied Gilbert: "you offer to make me your husband, do you not, Mademoiselle Legay?"

"Yes, Monsieur Gilbert."

"And it is since you have become rich that you have thought of this," returned Gilbert, hastily. "I am truly grateful to you, — I am indeed!"

"Really?"

"Certainly."

"Very well," said Nicole, frankly, and holding out her hand, "take it!"

"I?"

"You accept, do you not?"

"No; I refuse!"

Nicole sprang up from her leaning position. "Gilbert," said she, "you have a bad heart; and, trust me, what you now do will not bring you happiness. If I loved you still, if I felt any warmer sentiment in making the offer I have just made than a sense of duty and honor, trust me, I should now be miserable indeed; but having become rich, I did not wish it to be said that Nicole would look down on her old friend Gilbert. However, all is now over between us."

Gilbert made a gesture of indifference.

"What I think of your conduct in the matter," Nicole continued, "you must be well aware. I, whose character you know to be as free and independent as your own, had decided to bury myself here for your sake, when I had it in my power to go to Paris, which may be for me a scene of triumph. I would have borne to see before me, every day of the year, for a whole lifetime, that cold and impen-

etrable face, the mask of so many wicked thoughts. You have not perceived that there was any sacrifice in this; so much the worse for you, Gilbert! I do not say that you will regret me; but remember, you may yet feel remorse for the contempt and scorn you have shown me. Guided by you, I should have been a virtuous, happy, and contented woman; now I am abandoned on the ocean of life, without a keeping or a guiding hand. Gilbert, if I fall, God will not hold you innocent of my fall! Farewell!"

And the proud young girl turned away, without anger or impatience, but having shown, as all impassioned natures do in the time of trial, true generosity of soul. Gilbert shut his window quietly, and returned to the mysterious occupation in which she had interrupted him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAREWELL TO TAVERNEY.

NICOLE, before entering her mistress's apartment, stopped on the staircase to subdue some gathering emotions of resentment rising in her bosom. The baron encountered her as she stood motionless, thoughtful, her chin resting on her hand, and her brows contracted; and seeing her so pretty, he kissed her, as the Duc de Richelieu would have done at thirty years of age. Roused from her revery by this piece of gallantry, Nicole hurried up to Andrée's room, and found her just closing her trunk.

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Taverney, "have you come to a conclusion?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle," replied Nicole, with an air of deliberation.

"You will marry?"

"No, Mademoiselle."

"Ah, bah! And that great love?"

"My love will never do for me what the kindness of Mademoiselle has done for me. I belong to you, Mademoiselle, and wish always to belong to you. I know the mistress I have; I do not know the master I might have."

Andrée was touched by this unlooked-for exhibition of affectionate feeling in the giddy Nicole, and was far from suspecting that this choice had been a forced one. She smiled, pleased to find one human being better than she had expected.

"You do well, Nicole," she replied, "to attach yourself to me. I shall not forget it. Confide yourself to me, my child; and if any good fortune comes to me, you shall share it."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, it is decided; I will go with you!"

"Without regret?"

"Blindly."

"I do not like that answer, Nicole. I should not wish you at some future day to reproach yourself with having blindly trusted me and followed me."

"I shall never have to reproach any one but myself, Mademoiselle."

"Then you have had an explanation with your lover?"

Nicole blushed. "I?" she said.

"Yes, you; I saw you talking with him."

Nicole bit her lips. She had forgotten that Andrée's window was opposite that at which she had spoken to Gilbert. "It is true, Mademoiselle," she replied.

"And you told him all?"

Nicole thought Andrée had some particular reason for this question; and all her former suspicions returning, she answered, "I told him I would have nothing more to do with him."

It was plain that these two women — the one pure as the diamond, the other with a natural tendency to vice — would never understand each other.

In the mean time the baron had completed all his arrangements. An old sword which he had worn at Fontenoi, some parchments establishing his right to travel in his Majesty's carriages, and a litter of old papers, formed the most bulky part of his baggage. La Brie followed, tottering under the weight of an almost empty trunk. In the avenue they found the officer of the king's household, who, while waiting, had drained to the last drop his bottle of wine. The gallant had remarked the

fine waist and pretty ankle of Nicole, who was going back and forth with messages, and he had hovered about in the hope of exchanging a word with her. He was roused, however, to more active occupation by the baron's request that he would order the carriage to the door; he started, bowed, and in a sonorous voice summoned the coachman.

The carriage drew up. La Brie put the trunk on behind with an indescribable mixture of joy and pride in his looks. "I am really," murmured he, carried away by his enthusiasm, and thinking he was alone, "going to get into the king's carriage!"

"Behind it, behind it, my worthy friend!" replied Beausire, with a patronizing smile.

"What, Monsieur, are you going to take La Brie with you?" said Andrée to her father. "Who will take care of Taverney?"

"Why, *pardieu!* that good-for-nothing philosopher."

"Gilbert?"

"Yes; has he not a gun?"

"But how will he live?"

"By his gun, to be sure! Don't be uneasy; he will have excellent fare. Blackbirds and thrushes are not scarce at Taverney."

Andrée looked at Nicole; the latter began to laugh.

"And is that all the compassion you show for him, ungrateful girl?" said Andrée.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," replied Nicole, "he is very clever with his gun; he will not die of hunger!"

"But, Monsieur," said Andrée to the baron, "we must at least leave him two or three louis-d'or."

"To spoil him? Very fine indeed! He is vicious enough as he is!"

"He must have something to live on," persisted Andrée.

"The neighbors will help him, if he is in want."

"Don't be uneasy, Mademoiselle," said Nicole; "he will have no cause to ask their assistance."

"At all events," replied Andrée, "leave him two or three crowns."

"He would not accept them."

"He would not accept them? Then he is proud, this Monsieur Gilbert of yours?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, he is no longer mine, thank God!"

"Come, come!" said the baron; "let Gilbert go to the devil! The carriage is waiting; get in, my love."

Andrée did not reply. She cast a farewell look on the old château, and then got into the heavy and ponderous carriage. The baron seated himself beside her. La Brie, still wearing his splendid livery, and Nicole, who seemed never to have known such a person as Gilbert, mounted on the box. The coachman rode one of the horses as postilion.

"But where will the officer ride?" exclaimed the baron.

"On my horse, Monsieur, on my horse," replied Beausire, still eying Nicole, who colored with delight at having so soon replaced a rude peasant admirer by an elegant gentleman.

The carriage, drawn by four strong horses, started into rapid motion. The trees of the avenue glided away on each side, and disappeared one by one, sadly bending before the east wind, as if to bid farewell to their owners who abandoned them. The carriage reached the gate. Gilbert stood there, upright, immovable, his hat in his hand. He did not seem to see Andrée, yet he watched her least movement; her eyes were fixed on the dear home she was leaving, so as to keep it in view as long as possible.

"Stop a moment!" cried the baron to the postilion.

The carriage stopped.

"So, Monsieur Good-for-nothing, you are going to be happy; you will be quite alone, like a real philosopher, with nothing to do, and nobody to scold you. Don't let the house take fire; and, hark ye, take care of Mahon!"

Gilbert bowed, but did not reply. He felt as if Nicole's looks were a weight too great to be borne; he feared to meet her triumphant, ironical smile, as he would the touch of red-hot iron.

"Go on, postilion!" cried the baron.

Nicole did not smile, as Gilbert had feared she would; it even required more than her habitual power over herself to prevent her expressing aloud her pity for the poor young man thus heartlessly abandoned. She was obliged to keep her eye on Monsieur de Beausire, who looked so well on his prancing horse.

Now, as Nicole kept her eyes fixed on M. de Beausire, she did not see that Gilbert was gazing, his soul in his eyes, on Andrée. Andrée saw nothing but the house in which she was born, — in which her mother died. The carriage disappeared. Gilbert, a moment before of so little importance in the eyes of the travellers, was now nothing to them.

The baron, Andrée, Nicole, and La Brie, having passed through the gates of the avenue, entered a new world. Each had a special subject for reflection. The baron thought that at Bar-le-Duc he could easily raise five or six thousand livres on Balsamo's plate. Andrée repeated a prayer her mother had taught her, to keep away the demon of pride and ambition. Nicole covered her neck more closely with her handkerchief, to the great chagrin of M. de Beausire. La Brie, with his hand in his pocket, counted over the ten louis-d'or of the dauphiness, and the

two of Balsamo. M. de Beausire galloped at the side of the carriage.

Gilbert closed the gates of Taverney, whose hinges, as usual, creaked for lack of oil. Then he ran to his little room, pulled out his oaken chest of drawers, behind which he found a bundle tied up in a napkin, and slung it on his stick. After this, pushing his hands into his hay-stuffed mattress, he drew out something wrapped in a bit of paper. It was a shining crown-piece, — his savings for three or four years. He opened the paper, looked at his crown to assure himself that it had not been changed, and then put it in his pocket, still protected by its covering.

Mahon, on seeing Gilbert, began to howl loudly, making furious leaps the whole length of his chain. Having seen his other friends leave him, his fine instinct told him that Gilbert was also about to abandon him, and he howled louder and louder.

"Hush!" cried Gilbert, "hush Mahon!"

Then smiling bitterly at the parallel which occurred to his mind, he muttered, "Have they not abandoned me like a dog? Why should not I abandon thee like a man?" But after a minute's reflection he added, "They abandoned me free, at least, — free to seek for food. Well, then, Mahon, I will do for thee what they did for me, neither more nor less;" and he detached the dog's chain from the hook to which it was fastened. "You are free!" said he; "provide for yourself as you like!"

The dog bounded toward the house; but finding the doors all closed, he sprang toward the ruins and disappeared.

"And now," said Gilbert, "we shall see which has most instinct, — the dog, or the man!" So saying, he went out by the small gate, closed it, double-locked it, and threw the key over the wall.

But Nature speaks with the same voice in all hearts. Gilbert felt something like what Andrée had experienced in leaving Taverney. But with Andrée it was regret for the past; with Gilbert it was hope of a better future. "Farewell!" said he, turning to look for the last time at the château, whose pointed roof appeared above the sycamores and laburnums; "farewell, abode in which I have suffered so much, where every one hated me and threw me food grudgingly, and accused me of stealing. Be cursed! My heart bounds with joy, and I feel that I am free, for thy walls enclose me no more! Farewell, prison! hell! den of tyrants! — farewell forever!"

After this imprecation, Gilbert sprang forward on the road which the carriage had taken, fancying that he yet heard the roll of its distant wheels.

CHAPTER XIX.

GILBERT'S CROWN-PIECE.

After half-an-hour's headlong race, Gilbert uttered a cry of joy; he saw the carriage, about a quarter of a league before him, slowly ascending a hill. He felt his heart dilate with pride as he thought that he, with only youth, strength, spirit, was about to do all that wealth, power, and rank could accomplish. Then, indeed, might the baron have called Gilbert a philosopher, had he seen him, his stick on his shoulder, his small bundle slung on it, walking on with rapid strides, leaping down every slope which could shorten his path, and stopping at every ascent, chafing with impatience, as if saying to the horses, "You do not go fast enough for me; see, I am obliged to wait for you."

Philosopher? Yes! and he deserved the name, if it be philosophy to despise all that contributes to ease and to enjoyment. It was an interesting spectacle, worthy of being seen by the Creator of energetic and intelligent creatures, — this young man bounding forward on his way, all dusty and panting, for an hour or more, until he had almost overtaken the carriage, and then resting with delight when the horses were compelled to pause for breath. Gilbert that day would have inspired every one with admiration who could have followed him in spirit as we do; and who knows but that even the proud Andrée *bt have* been moved, could she have seen him, and

that her contempt for his indolence would have changed to admiration of his energy?

The day passed on in this manner. The baron stopped an hour at Bar-le-Duc, which gave Gilbert time to get in advance of him. He had heard the order to stop at the goldsmith's; so, having passed the town by a détour, without entering it, he hid in a thicket until he saw the carriage coming; and when it had gone by, followed it as before. Toward evening it came up with the train of the dauphiness at the little village of Brillon, the inhabitants of which, crowded on a hill, made the air resound with their shouts of welcome. Gilbert had not eaten a morsel during the entire day, except a bit of bread which he had brought with him from Taverney; but he had drunk plentifully from a rivulet which crossed the road, the water of which was so fresh and limpid that Andrée had requested that the carriage might stop, and had alighted to fill the chased cup, the only article of Balsamo's service which the baron could be persuaded to retain. Gilbert saw all this, hidden by some trees on the roadside. Then, when the carriage had passed on, he emerged from his hiding-place, and advancing to the bank, placed his foot on the same spot where Mademoiselle Taverney had stood, and dipping up the water in his hand, like Diogenes, he drank from the same stream which had brought refreshment to Andrée.

Evening came on, shrouding the landscape in her dusty mantle, until at last he saw nothing but the light from the large lantern placed on the left-hand side of the carriage; this pale gleam, ever hurrying onward in the distance, looked like a phantom impelled forward by some strange destiny. Then night came on. They had travelled twelve leagues; they were at Combles. The equipages stopped; Gilbert was sure that it was for the night,

that he should have time to stop for a couple of hours in a barn, and after that how vigorously would he pursue his way! He approached to listen for Andrée's voice; the carriage still continued stationary. He glided into a deep doorway: he saw Andrée by the glare of the torch-light, and heard her asking what hour it was. A voice replied, "Eleven o'clock." At that moment Gilbert no longer felt fatigue, and would have rejected with scorn an offer of a seat in a vehicle. Versailles already appeared in view, — Versailles, all gilded, shining, the city of nobles and kings; and beyond appeared Paris, grim, immense, — the city of the people!

Two things roused him from his ecstasy, — the noise of the carriages setting out again, and the complaints of his stomach, which began to be distressed for want of food. "Fortunately," he said to himself, "I have money; I am rich." On went the carriages, Gilbert following, his hunger unappeased. At midnight they stopped at St.-Dizier. For the night? No! only to change horses; while, in the mean time, the illustrious travellers took a little refreshment by torch-light.

Gilbert had need of all his courage; and as he heard them depart, he sprang to his feet from the bank, where he had seated himself, with an energy of determination which made him forget that, ten minutes before, his wearied legs had bent under him in spite of all his efforts. "Well," cried he, "go, go! I shall stop also for refreshment at St.-Dizier; I shall buy some bread and a slice of bacon; I shall drink a glass of wine, and for five sous I shall be refreshed as well as *the masters*."

Gilbert entered the town. The train having passed, l folks were closing their doors and shutters; but osopher saw a good-looking inn not yet shut up, e large dishes of fowls and other things showed

that the attendants of the dauphiness had had time to levy only a very slight contribution. He entered the kitchen resolutely; the hostess was there, counting her gains.

"Excuse me, Madame, but can I have some bread and ham?" said Gilbert.

"We have no ham, but you can have fowl."

"No, thank you; I ask for ham because I wish for ham, — I don't like fowl."

"That is a pity, my little fellow, for we have only fowl; but it shall not be dearer," she added, smiling, "than ham. Take half of one, or, indeed, take a whole one, for tenpence; and that will be provision for you for to-morrow. We thought her Royal Highness would have stayed all night, and that we should have sold all these things to the attendants; but as she merely passed through, they will be wasted."

It might be thought that Gilbert would have gladly embraced the generous offer of the kind hostess; but that would be to misunderstand his character completely. "No, thank you," he replied, "I shall satisfy myself in a more humble manner; I am neither a prince nor a footman."

"Well, then," said the good woman, "I will give you the fowl, my little Artaban."

"I am not a beggar either," he replied, in a mortified tone; "I buy what I wish, and pay for it;" and he majestically plunged his hand in his breeches-pocket: it went down to the elbow. But in vain he fumbled in that capacious receptacle; he brought forth from it only the paper wrapper. The crown, tossed about by his rapid movements, had worn the paper, then the thin lining of his pocket, and had slipped out at his knee; for he had unfastened his garters to give freer play to his limbs.

His paleness and trembling touched the good woman. Many in her place would have rejoiced on seeing his pride brought low; but she felt sympathy for him, seeing suffering so strongly expressed in the changes of his countenance. "Come, my poor boy!" said she, "you shall sup and sleep here; and to-morrow, if you must go on, you shall do so."

"Oh, yes, yes!" exclaimed Gilbert, "I must go on, — not to-morrow, but at once!" And snatching up his bundle, without waiting to hear more, he darted out of the house, to hide his shame and grief in the darkness. He rushed on, alone, truly alone in the world; for no man is more alone than he who has just parted with his last crown, — especially if it be the only one he ever possessed. The night was dark around him; what should he do? He hesitated. To turn back to look for his crown would be to begin a hopeless task; besides, it would make it impossible for him ever to come up with the carriages. He resolved to continue his way. After he had gone about a league, hunger, which his mental suffering had made him forget for a time, awoke more keen than ever. Weariness also began to encroach upon his strength; yet by incredible efforts he had once more come in sight of the carriages. But Fate, it would seem, had decided against him. They stopped only to change horses, and made the exchange so quickly that he had not five minutes to rest himself.

Again Gilbert set out. The day began to dawn; the sun appeared above a broad circle of dark clouds, foretelling one of those burning days of May which sometimes precede the heats of summer. How could Gilbert bear the heat at noon of that day? He had for a moment the idea, flattering to his vanity, that horses, men, the destinies, had united against him. Like Ajax, he shook his

clenched fist at the heavens; and if he did not say, like him, "I shall escape, in spite of the gods!" it was because he knew "Le Contrat Social" better than the Odyssey.

At last, however, as Gilbert had dreaded, the moment arrived when he found it quite impossible to go much farther. By a last and almost despairing effort, he once more overtook the carriages, of which he had previously lost sight, and which, under the influence of his heated and feverish imagination, he fancied were surrounded with a strange, fantastic halo. The noise of the wheels sounded like thunder in his ears, and almost maddened his brain. He staggered on, his blackened lips wide apart, his eyes fixed and staring, his long hair clinging to his forehead bathed in perspiration, and his movements seeming rather the effect of some clever piece of mechanism than those of a thinking being. Since the evening before he had travelled upward of twenty leagues, and his weary and fainting limbs now refused to carry him farther. A mist overspread his eyes, strange noises sounded in his ears, the earth seemed to reel under him; he endeavored to cry out, but could utter no sound, and staggered forward, beating the air wildly with his arms. At last his voice returned to his throat in cries of rage; and turning toward Paris, or rather toward where he thought Paris was, he uttered against the conquerors of his courage and his strength a series of terrible imprecations. Then, tearing his hair with both hands, he reeled forward, and fell heavily to the ground, — with the consolation of having, like a hero of antiquity, fought the battle to the last.

"Out of the way, there! Out of the way, madman!" cried a hoarse voice just as he fell, accompanied by the loud cracking of a whip.

Gilbert did not hear; he had fainted.

"Out of the way! or I shall crush you, *morbleu!*"

And this time the words were accompanied by a vigorous stroke of a whip, which reached Gilbert's waist and cut into the flesh. But he felt nothing; he remained immovable under the feet of the horses of a carriage, which was issuing into the high road from a by-way between Thiéblemont and Vauclère.

A shrill cry was heard from the carriage, which was going at a high rate of speed. The postilion made an almost superhuman effort, but could not prevent one of the horses, which was placed as a leader, from leaping over Gilbert. The other two, however, he succeeded in pulling up. A lady leaned out of the carriage. "Heavens!" she cried, "you have killed the poor boy!"

"Why, faith, Madame," replied the postilion, endeavoring to discover the body amid the cloud of dust which the horses' feet had raised, "it looks that way to me."

"Poor creature! poor boy! Do not move a step farther!" and opening the door of the carriage herself, she sprang out.

The postilion had already alighted, and was dragging out Gilbert's body, which he expected to find bruised and bloody; the lady assisted him with all her strength.

"What an escape!" he cried. "Not a scratch, not a kick!"

"But he has fainted," said the lady.

"Only from fear. Let us place him against the bank; and since Madame is in haste, let us go on."

"Impossible! I cannot leave that child in such a state."

"Pooh! it 's nothing, Madame; he will soon recover."

"No, no! Poor fellow, he is some runaway lad from college, and has undertaken a journey beyond his strength. See how pale he is! he might die. No; I will not leave him. Lift him into the carriage, and place him on the front seat."

The postilion obeyed. The lady had already resumed her place in the carriage. Gilbert was laid lengthwise on a good cushion, his head supported by the well-stuffed side of the carriage.

"And now," cried the lady, "we have lost ten minutes; a crown for you if you make up for them."

The postilion cracked his whip above his head; the horses knew what this threatened, and set off at a gallop.

CHAPTER XX.

GILBERT FINDS CONSOLATION FOR THE LOSS OF HIS CROWN.

When Gilbert returned to consciousness, he was in no small degree surprised to find himself placed at the feet of a young lady who was watching him attentively.

This young lady was about twenty-five years old, with large gray eyes, a nose slightly turned up, cheeks embrowned by a Southern sun, and a delicate little mouth, the peculiar shape of which added to the naturally cheerful and laughing expression of her face a touch of shrewdness and circumspection. Her neck and arms, which were beautifully formed, were displayed to advantage by a closely-fitting bodice of violet-colored velvet with golden buttons, while the skirt of her dress, of gray silk, was so enormously wide as to fill almost the entire carriage. Gilbert continued for some time to gaze on this face, which looked on his smilingly and with much interest, and he could scarcely persuade himself that he was not in a dream.

"Well, my child," said the lady, "are you not better now?"

"Where am I?" asked he, languidly.

"You are in safety now, my little man," replied the lady, who spoke with a strong Southern accent; "but just now you were in great danger of being crushed under the wheels of my carriage. What could have happened to you to make you fall in that manner just in the middle of the highway?"

"I was overcome by weakness, Madame, from having travelled too far."

"Then you have been some time on the road?"

"Since yesterday, at four in the afternoon."

"And how far have you journeyed?"

"I think about eighteen leagues."

"What! in fourteen hours?"

"Oh, I ran all the way!"

"Where are you going, then?"

"To Versailles, Madame."

"And you came from —"

"From Taverney."

"Taverney! where is that?"

"It is a château situated between Pierrefitte and Bar-le-Duc."

"But you have scarcely had time to eat on the way?"

"I not only had not time, Madame, but I had not the means."

"How so?"

"I lost my money on the way."

"So that since yesterday you have eaten nothing?"

"Only a few mouthfuls of bread, which I brought with me."

"Poor child! But why did you not beg something?"

"Because I am proud, Madame," said he, smiling scornfully.

"Proud! It is all very fine to be proud; but when one is dying of hunger —"

"Better death than dishonor."

The lady looked at the sententious speaker with something like admiration. "But who are you, my friend," said she, "who speak in this style?"

"I am an orphan."

"What is your name?"

"Gilbert."

"Gilbert what?"

"Gilbert nothing."

"Ah!" said the lady, still more surprised.

Gilbert perceived that he had produced an effect, and felt as if he were another Rousseau.

"You are very young to wander about in this way," continued the lady.

"I was left, deserted and alone, in an old château which the family had abandoned. I did as they had done, — I abandoned it too."

"Without any object in view?"

"The world is wide; there is room for all."

"And you lost your purse. Was it well filled?"

"There was only one crown in it," Gilbert replied, divided between the shame of confessing his poverty and the fear of naming a large sum, which might have excited the suspicion that it had not been fairly obtained; "but it would have been enough."

"One crown for such a journey! Why, it would scarcely have been sufficient to purchase bread for two days; and the distance! — good heavens! from Bar-le-Duc to Paris is nearly sixty-five leagues!"

"I never counted the leagues, Madame; I only said, I must get to Paris."

"And thereupon you set out, poor simpleton?"

"Oh, I have good legs!"

"Good as they are, they failed, you see."

"Oh! it was not my legs, it was hope which failed me."

"Why, indeed, you looked as if you were desperate."

Gilbert smiled bitterly.

"What was passing in your mind? You struck your forehead with your clenched hand, and tore out your hair by handfuls."

"Indeed, Madame?" asked Gilbert, who was rather embarrassed.

"Oh! I am certain of it; it was your despair, probably, which prevented your hearing or seeing the carriage."

Gilbert's instinct told him that he might increase his consequence, and still more awaken the interest of the lady, by telling the whole truth. "I was, indeed, in despair," said he.

"And about what?" said the lady.

"Because I could not keep up with a carriage which I was following."

"Indeed," said the young lady, smiling, "this is quite a romance. Is there love in the case?"

Gilbert was not yet sufficiently master of himself not to blush.

"And what carriage was it, my little Cato?"

"A carriage in the train of the dauphiness."

"What do you tell me?" exclaimed the young woman; "is the dauphiness before us?"

"Certainly."

"I thought her scarcely yet at Nancy. Are no honors paid her on the way, that she advances so rapidly?"

"Oh, yes, Madame! but her Highness seems to be in haste."

"In haste? Who told you so?"

"I guessed it."

"On what grounds?"

"Why, she said at first she would stay two or three hours at Taverney, and she stayed only three quarters of an hour."

"Do you know whether she received any letters from Paris?"

"I saw a gentleman, in a dress covered with embroidery, who had a letter in his hand as he entered."

"Did you hear his name mentioned?"

"No, Madame; I know only that he is the governor of Strasburg."

"What! the Comte de Stainville, brother-in-law to the Duc de Choiseul! Horrible! Faster, postilion, faster!"

A vigorous stroke of the whip was the reply, and Gilbert felt the speed of the carriage increase.

"But she must stop to breakfast," said the lady, as if speaking to herself, "and then we shall pass her, — unless last night — Did she stop last night?"

"Yes, at St.-Dizier."

"At what hour?"

"At about eleven o'clock."

"That was for supper. Good! she will have to take breakfast. Postilion, what is the next town?"

"Vitry, Madame."

"How far are we from it?"

"Three leagues."

"Where shall we change horses?"

"At Vauclère."

"Well, drive on; and if you see a train of carriages on the road before us, let me know."

While the lady was exchanging these words with the postilion, Gilbert had again nearly fainted. When she once more turned toward him, he was pale, and his eyes were closed.

"Poor child!" said she, "he is fainting again. It is my fault; I made him talk when he was dying of hunger, instead of giving him something to eat and drink." She took from the pocket of the carriage a richly-carved flask, with a little silver goblet hanging round its neck by a chain, and poured out some of the contents for Gilbert. On this occasion he did not require to be asked twice, — either because the goblet was offered

by a pretty hand, or because his necessity was more pressing than at St.-Dizier.

"Now," said the lady, "eat a biscuit; in an hour or so you shall breakfast more substantially."

"Thank you, Madame," said Gilbert, gladly taking the biscuit, as he had taken the wine.

"Good! Now that you have recovered a little strength," said the lady, "tell me, if you are disposed to have confidence in me, what induced you to follow a carriage in the train of the dauphiness?"

"Well, Madame, you shall hear the truth. I was living with the Baron de Taverney when her Highness came. She commanded him to follow her to Paris; he obeyed. I was an orphan, and consequently nobody thought of me; they left me there, without food and without money. So I resolved, since everybody was going to Versailles, with the assistance of good horses and fine coaches, I, with the assistance of only my legs, would go to Versailles, and as soon as the horses. But Fate was against me. If I had not lost my money, I should have had something to eat last night; and if I had eaten last night, I should have overtaken the horses this morning."

"Very well. You showed courage, and I like that; but you forgot that at Versailles people cannot live on courage alone."

"I shall go to Paris."

"But in that respect Paris much resembles Versailles."

"If courage will not support me, labor will."

"A good answer, my child. But what sort of labor? Your hands do not seem those of a workman or porter."

"I shall study, Madame."

"I think you seem to know a great deal already."

"Yes, for I know that I know nothing!" replied Gilbert, remembering the aphorism of Socrates.

"And may I ask, my young friend, what branch of study you would choose?"

"I think, Madame, that the best is that which teaches man to be most useful to his fellows. Besides, man is so frail a being that he should learn the secret of his weakness, in order that he may know that of his strength. I should like to know, some day, why my stomach prevented my legs from carrying me any farther this morning, and if it was not that weakness of my stomach which brought to my brain that wrath, that fever, that black vapor, which overcame me."

"Really, you will make an excellent physician; it seems to me that you talk medicine admirably already. In ten years you shall have me for a patient."

"I shall try to deserve that honor, Madame."

They had now reached the place where they were to change horses. The young lady asked for information respecting the dauphiness, and found that she had passed through that place a quarter of an hour before; she intended to stop at Vitry to change horses and to breakfast.

Another postilion took his place in the saddle. The lady allowed him to leave the village at the usual speed; but when they had got a little beyond the last house, — "Postilion," said she, "will you engage to overtake the carriages of the dauphiness?"

"Certainly, Madame."

"Before they reach Vitry?"

"The devil! they were going at full trot."

"Yes; but if you were to go at a gallop?"

The postilion looked at her.

"Treble pay," said she.

"If you had said so at first," he replied, "we should ve been a quarter of a league farther by this time."

"Well, here is a crown on account; make up for lost time."

The postilion's arm was stretched back, the lady's forward, their hands met, and the crown passed from the lady's hand to that of the postilion. The horses received a sharp stroke of the whip, and the carriage started off with the speed of the wind.

During the change of horses Gilbert had alighted and washed his face and hands at a fountain, had smoothed down his hair, which was very thick, and had altogether improved his appearance very much.

"In truth," said the lady to herself, "he is not too ugly for a physician;" and she smiled as she looked at him. Gilbert blushed, as if he knew what was in her mind.

Having finished her dialogue with the postilion, she turned once more to Gilbert, whose paradoxes and sententious humor amused her exceedingly. From time to time she interrupted herself in a burst of laughter, occasioned by his sententious replies, to lean out of the carriage and look anxiously before her. They had gone about a league in this way, when she uttered a cry of joy; she had seen the last wagons of the dauphiness's train as they were slowly ascending a steep hill, and now there appeared in advance of them about twenty carriages, from which many of the travellers had got out to walk beside them. Gilbert put out his head also, searching with burning eyes for Mademoiselle de Taverney in the midst of the crowd of pygmies, and thought he recognized Nicole by her high cap.

"And now, Madame," said the postilion, "what must we do?"

"We must get before them."

"Get before them? Impossible, Madame! We cannot pass the carriage of the dauphiness."

"Why not?"

"Because it is expressly forbidden. *Peste!* pass the king's horses! I should be sent to the galleys."

"Now listen, my good fellow: manage it as you please, but I must positively get before those carriages."

"But do you not belong to the train of her Royal Highness?" asked Gilbert.

"It is very proper to wish for information," replied she, "but we should not ask indiscreet questions."

"I beg your pardon, Madame," said he, reddening.

"Well, postilion, what are we to do?"

"Why, faith! keep behind till we reach Vitry; and then, if her Highness stops, ask permission to go on before her."

"Ay; but then they would want to know who I am. They would learn — No, no, that will not do; we must find out some other way."

"Madame," said Gilbert, "if I might give advice —"

"Yes, yes, my young friend; if you have any good advice, give it."

"Could we not take some by-road which would bring us round to Vitry, and so get before the dauphiness without having been wanting in respect to her?"

"Excellent! The boy is right," cried the young lady. "Postilion, is there a by-road?"

"To go whither?"

"Whither you like, provided you leave the dauphiness behind."

"There is, in fact, a by-road leading round Vitry, and joining the high road again at Lachaussée."

"That is it; that is the very thing!" cried the lady.

"But, Madame, if I take that road, you must double the pay."

"Two louis-d'or for you if we get to Lachaussée before the dauphiness."

"Madame is not afraid, then, of her carriage being broken?"

"I care for nothing! If it breaks, I shall proceed on horseback."

And turning to the right, they entered a cross-road full of deep ruts, bordered by a little river, which falls into the Marne between Lachaussée and Martigny.

The postilion kept his word. He did all that human power could do to break the carriage, but at the same time to arrive before the dauphiness. A dozen times Gilbert was thrown into the lady's arms, and a dozen times she into his. Intimacy springs up quickly from jolting on in the loneliness of a carriage; and after two hours' travelling on this by-road it seemed to Gilbert as if he had known his companion ten years, and she on her part would have sworn she had known him since his birth. About eleven o'clock they came again on the high road between Vitry and Châlons. A courier whom they questioned told them that the dauphiness was not only staying to breakfast at Vitry, but that she meant to take two hours' repose. He added that he had been sent forward to desire those who attended to the horses to have them in readiness between three and four o'clock. This news filled the lady with joy. She gave the postilion the two louis-d'or which she had promised him; and turning to Gilbert, "So now," said she, "we shall be able to dine at the next stopping-place." But fate had decided that Gilbert should not dine there.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH A NEW PERSONAGE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.

From the top of the hill which the lady's carriage was ascending, the village of Lachaussée might be seen; it was there she was to change horses and stop to dine. It was a lovely little village, with its thatched cottages scattered here and there at the caprice of the owners, — some in the very middle of the road, some half-hidden under the shade of a grove which bordered the highway, and some following the course of the little river which we have mentioned, over which the inhabitants had placed temporary rustic bridges to reach their dwellings.

At that moment, however, the most remarkable object in the village was a man, who, looking down the brook, was standing right in the middle of the road, as if he had been ordered to keep watch there. Sometimes he looked up, sometimes down the road; then he turned a longing eye toward a beautiful gray horse with long mane and tail, which was fastened to the window-shutter of a cabin, which he shook in his impatient tossing of his head, — an impatience which might be explained by the saddle on his back, indicating that he was waiting for his master.

From time to time the stranger ventured to approach the horse to pat his side, or pass his hand down his slender legs; and then, when he luckily escaped the kick which was offered him at each attempt, he returned to

his occupation of watching the road. Wearied at last by this fruitless watching, he knocked on the window-shutter. "Holloa! In there!" he shouted.

"Who is there?" replied a man's voice; and the shutter was opened.

"Monsieur," said the stranger, "if your horse is to be sold, the buyer is here at hand."

"You can see he has no wisp at his tail," answered the other, who appeared to be a countryman; and he shut the window.

This answer did not appear to satisfy the stranger, for he knocked again. He was a tall, stout man, about forty years of age, with a ruddy complexion, a black beard, and large, sinewy hands, peeping out from fine lace ruffles. He wore a hat edged with gold lace and set on crosswise, resembling those officers of the provinces who try to look fierce in the eyes of the Parisians. He knocked a third time. Then he became impatient. "Do you know, my honest fellow," he cried, "you are not very polite? If you don't open your shutter, I 'll break it in!"

At this threat the shutter opened, and the same face appeared again.

"But when you were told the horse is not for sale," replied the peasant for the second time, "what the devil — is not that enough?"

"But when I tell you that I want a fast animal!"

"Well, if you want one, can you not go to the post-house? There are sixty of the king's there; you surely can choose from among them. But leave a man who has only one that one!"

"I tell you this is the very one I want!"

"A nice proposal, indeed! An Arabian —"

"That is the reason I want it."

"Very possibly; but it is not for sale."

"Whose is it?"

"You are very curious!"

"And you are very discreet!"

"Well, it belongs to a person asleep in the house."

"A man, or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Tell the woman, then, that I will give her five hundred pistoles for her horse."

"Oh, ho!" said the peasant, staring; "five hundred pistoles! That is a sum!"

"Tell her it is the king who wants her horse."

"The king?"

"Yes, in person!"

"Oh, come! you are not the king, are you?"

"No, but I represent him."

"You represent the king?" said the peasant, taking off his hat.

"Come, come! make haste! The king is in a hurry!" and the burly stranger cast another impatient glance toward the highway.

"Well, when the lady awakes I will tell her."

"Yes, but I can't wait till she wakes."

"What is to be done, then?"

"*Parbleu!* awaken her!"

"Awaken her? Certainly not."

"Well, I shall do it myself!"

But just as the stranger, who pretended to be the representative of his Majesty, advanced to knock at the window of the upper story with the handle of his long whip, he caught a glimpse of a carriage coming along at the utmost speed of the worn-out horses. His quick eye recognized it instantly, and he sprang forward to meet it: it was that in which were Gilbert and his guardian angel. On seeing this man, who made signs to him to stop, the postilion

gladly obeyed; for he scarcely knew whether the horses could take him to the post-house.

"Chon! my dear Chon!" cried the stranger, "is it you at last?"

"It is, Jean," replied the lady addressed by this singular name. "And what are you doing here?"

"*Pardieu!* a pretty question! I am waiting for you." And he leaped on the step of the carriage, and putting in his long arms, seized her and covered her with kisses. "Ha!" said he, all at once observing Gilbert, who looked on with surprise at these strange proceedings, "what the deuce have you here?"

"Oh! a little philosopher, and very amusing," replied Mademoiselle Chon, little caring whether she hurt or flattered the pride of her new acquaintance.

"And where did you pick him up?"

"On the road; but that is not the question."

"True," said the person who was called Jean. "What about our old Comtesse de Béarn?"

"All settled!"

"What, settled?"

"Yes, she will come."

"But what did you say to her?"

"That I was the daughter of her lawyer, Maître Flageot; that I was passing through Verdun; and that my father desired me to tell her her lawsuit was coming on. I merely added that her presence in Paris had now become indispensable for its success."

"What did she say to that?"

"She opened her little gray eyes, took a long pinch of snuff, said that Monsieur Flageot was the cleverest man in the world, and gave orders for her departure!"

"Admirable, Chon! I shall make you my ambassador extraordinary. And now, shall we breakfast?"

"With all my heart; for this poor child is dying of hunger. But we must be quick, for she will soon overtake us."

"Who, — the old countess? Nonsense."

"No, the dauphiness."

"Bah! The dauphiness is scarcely at Nancy yet."

"She is at Vitry, — three leagues off!"

"*Peste!* That alters the case! Drive on, drive on, postilion!"

"To what place, Monsieur?"

"To the post-house."

The carriage drove off, with the stranger still standing on the step, and soon drew up before the inn-door.

"Quick, quick!" said Chon. "Let us have some cutlets, a fowl, some eggs, and a bottle of Burgundy. We must set out again instantly."

"Excuse me, Madame," said the innkeeper, stepping forward, "but in that case it must be with your own horses."

"What!" said Jean, leaping heavily down from the step of the carriage. "With our own horses?"

"Certainly, with those that brought you."

"Impossible!" said the postilion; "they have already done a double stage. See what a state they are in!"

"Oh! that is true," said Chon; "it would be utterly impossible to proceed farther with them."

"But what prevents your giving us fresh horses?" asked Jean.

"Merely that I have none."

"What the devil! You know the regulations; it is your duty to have horses."

"The regulations, Monsieur, oblige me to have fifteen ses in my stables."

'Very well?"

"Well, I have eighteen."

"That is more than I ask for, since I need only three."

"Yes, but they are all out."

"What! all the eighteen?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Damnation!" thundered the traveller.

"Oh, viscount, viscount!" cried Chon.

"Yes, yes, Chon, don't be afraid; I will keep calm. And when will your miserable hacks be in?" continued the viscount, turning to the host.

"Faith, Monsieur, I don't know; it all depends on the postilions. Perhaps in an hour, — perhaps in two hours."

"Now, my good fellow," said Vicomte Jean, placing his hat on one side, and putting out his right leg, "I wish you to understand this: I never jest."

"I am sorry for it, Monsieur. I should like you much better if you did."

"Now, take my advice! Let the horses be harnessed before I get angry."

"Go into the stable yourself, Monsieur; and if you find a horse there, you shall have it for nothing."

"Indeed! — and what if I should find sixty?"

"It would be just the same as if there were none; for these sixty horses are the king's."

"Well, what then?"

"What then? — they are not to be hired out!"

"What the devil are they here for, then?"

"For the use of Madame the dauphiness!"

"What! sixty horses in the stalls, and not one for me?"

"But you know, Monsieur —"

"I know only one thing, and that is, that I am in a hurry."

"It is a pity."

"And," continued the viscount, without heeding the

postmaster's interruption, "as the dauphiness will not be here before the evening — "

"What do you say?" exclaimed the host, all alarmed.

"I say that the horses will be back before she arrives!"

"Can it be possible you would propose — "

"*Parbleu!*" said the viscount, going into the stable, "I will have three horses; I don't want eight, like royal personages, although I have a right to them, — by alliance, at least."

"But I say you shall not have one!" said the host, throwing himself between the stranger and his horses.

"Scoundrel!" cried the viscount, turning pale with anger, "do you know who I am?"

"Viscount, viscount, in Heaven's name, no broils!" cried Chon.

"You are right, my good little Chon;" then, after a moment's thought, he turned with his most charming smile to the host. "My dear friend," he said, "I am going to take the responsibility off your shoulders."

"How so?" asked the host, by no means reassured, notwithstanding the friendly manner of his interlocutor.

"I shall help myself; here are three horses that suit me exactly."

"And you call that freeing me from responsibility?"

"Certainly; you have not given them to me, — it is I who take them."

"I tell you the thing is impossible!"

"We shall see about that. Where is the harness?"

"Let no one stir, at his peril!" cried the host to two or three grooms loitering about.

"Scoundrels!" cried the viscount.

"Jean, my dear Jean!" exclaimed Chon, "you will only bring us into some disagreeable situation. When on a mission like this we must endure — "

"Everything except delay," said Jean, with the utmost coolness; "and since these rogues won't help me, I shall do the business myself." And Jean coolly took from the wall, one after another, three sets of harness, and fitted them on three of the horses.

"Jean, Jean, I entreat you, do not be rash!" cried Chon, clasping her hands.

"Do you wish to arrive in Paris, or not?" said the viscount, grinding his teeth.

"Of course I do. All is lost if we do not hasten on!"

"Well, then, leave me alone." And separating three horses — not the worst — from the others, he led them to the carriage.

"Take care, Monsieur, take care!" cried the host; "it is high treason to steal those horses!"

"I am not going to steal them, you fool; I'm only going to borrow them. Come on, my little pets!"

The host sprang forward to catch the reins; but before he could touch them, he was rudely repulsed by the stranger.

"Brother, brother!" cried Mademoiselle Chon.

"Ah, he is her brother!" muttered Gilbert to himself, breathing more freely.

At this moment a window was opened on the opposite side of the way, and a lovely female face was seen. She appeared quite alarmed at the noise.

"Oh! it is you, Madame?" cried Jean, who immediately perceived her.

"I, Monsieur? What do you mean?" she replied, in bad French.

"You have awaked; so much the better. Will you sell your horse?"

"My horse?"

"Yes, the gray Arabian, tied to the window-shutter there. You know I offered you five hundred pistoles."

"My horse is not for sale, Monsieur," said she, shutting the window.

"Well, I am not in luck to-day; people will neither sell nor hire. But, *corbleu!* I'll take the Arabian, if she won't sell it; and I'll drive these hacks to the devil, if they won't let me have them. Come, Patrice!"

The footman on his sister's carriage jumped down.

"Put them to the carriage!" said Jean.

"Help! help!" shouted the host.

Two grooms ran forward.

"Jean! viscount!" cried poor Chon, writhing in the carriage, and endeavoring in vain to open the door. "You are mad; we shall all be slaughtered!"

"Slaughtered! It is we who shall slaughter them, I hope. We are three against three! Come out, my young philosopher!" thundered Jean, addressing Gilbert, who never stirred, so great was his astonishment; "come out, and do something, — sticks, stones, or fists; anything will do! *Morbleu!* you look like a saint carved on stone!"

Gilbert gave an inquiring and supplicating glance at his protectress, but she held him by the arm. The host in the mean time bawled incessantly, dragging the horses in one direction, while Jean pulled them in the other. But the struggle could not last forever. Jean, wearied and heated, dealt the defender of the horses such a blow with his clenched fist that the latter fell back into the horse-pond, among his frightened ducks and geese, shouting, as he plunged in, "Help! murder! murder!"

The viscount, thus rid of his adversary, lost no time in attaching the horses.

"Help, in the name of the king! Help!" cried the host, rising, and endeavoring to rally his frightened grooms.

"Who calls for help in the name of the king?" cried a

cavalier, riding at full speed into the yard of the post-house, and reining up his horse, bathed in sweat and foam, in the very midst of the actors in this tumultuous scene.

"M. Philippe de Taverney!" muttered Gilbert to himself, sinking down in the carriage to escape observation. Chon, who lost no opportunity of acquiring information, heard the young man's name.

CHAPTER XXII.

VICOMTE JEAN.

THE young lieutenant of the body-guard of the dauphin — for it was he — leaped from his horse at the aspect of this strange scene, which began to collect about the post-house all the women and children of the village. On seeing Philippe, the postmaster was ready to throw himself on his knees before his protector, whom Providence had sent him so opportunely.

"Monsieur," he cried, "do you know what is happening?"

"No," replied Philippe, coldly, "but you are going to tell me, my friend."

"Well! they are attempting to take by force some of the horses of her Royal Highness the dauphiness?"

Philippe drew back, as if he heard what was absolutely incredible. "And who has made this attempt?" he inquired.

"I, Monsieur! — *mordieu!* — I myself!" said Jean.

"You are mistaken," said Taverney, shaking his head, — "it cannot be; otherwise Monsieur is either mad, or no gentleman!"

"It is you who are mistaken, — on both points, my dear Lieutenant," said the viscount. "My head is all right, and I ride in his Majesty's carriages."

"What! You are in your perfect senses, and are received at court, and yet you dare to take the horses of the dauphiness?"

"In the first place, there are sixty horses. Her Royal Highness can employ only eight; and it would be strange indeed if I should unluckily pitch upon the very ones she wanted."

"True, Monsieur,—there are sixty horses," replied the young man; "and her Royal Highness will employ only eight; but that does not hinder every horse, from the first to the sixtieth, being for her service; and between these horses no distinction can be made."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur; it is made," said the viscount, contemptuously, "since I have taken these three for myself. Shall I go on foot, when rascally lackeys are drawn by four horses? *Mordieu!* let them be satisfied, as I am, with three, and there will be enough for us all."

"If the lackeys have four horses, Monsieur, it is by the king's order; and now have the goodness to order your footman to take those horses back to the stable." These words Philippe pronounced firmly, but with so much politeness that none but a ruffian would have answered otherwise than respectfully.

"You may be right, my dear Lieutenant," answered Jean, "to speak in this manner, if it be a part of your duty to attend to the cattle; but I did not know that the gentlemen of the dauphin's body-guard had been raised to the rank of grooms. Shut your eyes; tell your people to do the same; and good-by."

"Monsieur, whether I have been raised or lowered to the rank of groom is not the question; what I do is my duty, for I am commanded by the dauphiness herself to attend to the relays."

"Oh! that alters the case; but allow me to tell you that you are filling a sorry office, Mr. Lieutenant, and if this is the way the young lady begins to treat the army—"

"Of whom do you speak, Monsieur?" interrupted Philippe.

"Why, *parbleu!* of the Austrian."

The chevalier turned pale. "Do you dare," he exclaimed, "to speak —"

"I not only dare to speak," interrupted Jean, "but I dare to act. Come, Patrice; hasten, we are pressed for time."

Philippe seized the first horse by the bridle. "Monsieur," said he, in a perfectly calm voice, "do me the favor to give your name."

"Do you wish particularly to know it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I am the Vicomte Jean Dubarry."

"What! you are the brother of that —"

"Who will send you to rot in the Bastille if you say one word more;" and Jean jumped into the carriage.

Philippe approached the door. "Vicomte Jean Dubarry," said he, "you will do me the honor to come out."

"Ah, indeed! I have plenty of leisure for that!" said the viscount, endeavoring to shut the door.

"If you hesitate one instant, Monsieur," replied Philippe, preventing him with his left hand from closing the carriage-door, "I give you my word of honor I will run you through the body!" and, as he spoke, he drew his sword.

"Oh!" cried Chon, "we shall be murdered. Give up the horses, Jean; give them up!"

"Ah, you threaten me!" shouted Jean, grinding his teeth and snatching up his sword, which he had laid on the seat of the carriage before him.

"And the threat shall be followed up if you delay a single moment,— do you hear? — a single moment;" and the young man's sword glanced before Jean's eyes.

"We shall never get away," whispered Chon, "if you do not manage this officer by gentle means."

"Neither gentleness nor violence shall stop me in the discharge of my duty," said Philippe, who had overheard the advice, bowing; "I recommend you, Madame, to advise Monsieur le Vicomte to submit in time, or in the name of the king, whom I represent, I shall be forced to kill him if he consents to fight, or to arrest him if he does not."

"And I tell you I shall have the horses in spite of you!" shouted Jean, leaping out of the carriage and drawing his sword.

"That remains to be proved, Monsieur," said Philippe, putting himself on guard; "are you ready?"

"Lieutenant," said the brigadier commanding under Philippe, "there are six of our men near; shall I —"

"Do not stir, Monsieur," said the lieutenant; "this is a personal quarrel. Come, Monsieur le Vicomte, I am at your service."

Mademoiselle Chon shrieked, and Gilbert wished the carriage had been as deep as a well, to hide him.

Jean began the attack; he was a good swordsman, but anger prevented him from turning his skill to advantage. Philippe, on the contrary, was as cool as if he had been playing with a foil in the fencing-school. The viscount advanced, retired, leaped to the right, to the left, shouting in making his passes like the fencing-master of a regiment; while the chevalier, with closed teeth and steady eye, immovable as a statue, watched all his adversary's movements and divined his intentions. Every one in the yard was silent, attentively looking on; even Chon ceased to scream. For some minutes the combat continued without Jean's feints, shouts, and movements producing any effect, but also without his having permitted Philippe, who

doubtless was studying his opponent's play, to touch him once. All at once, however, the viscount sprang back, uttering a cry of pain, and at the same moment his ruffles were stained with blood, which ran down his fingers in large drops. Philippe's sword had pierced the forearm of his adversary. "You are wounded, Monsieur," said he.

"*Sacrebleu*, I am aware of it!" cried Jean, turning pale and letting his sword fall.

The chevalier took it up and restored it to him. "Take it, Monsieur," said he, "and commit no more such follies."

"*Peste!* if I commit them I pay for them," growled the viscount. "Come here quick, my poor Chonchon; come," added he to his sister, who sprang from the carriage and hastened to his assistance.

"You will do me the justice, Madame," said Philippe, "to acknowledge that all this has not been caused by my fault. I deeply regret having been driven to such extremities before a lady;" and bowing, he retired. "Let those horses be unharnessed and taken back to the stable," said he to the postmaster.

Jean shook his fist at Philippe, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah!" cried the postmaster, "here are three horses coming in! Courtin, Courtin, quick! put them to the gentleman's carriage."

"But, Master —" said the postilion.

"Come, come! no reply; the gentleman is in a hurry. Don't be uneasy, Monsieur, you shall have the horses."

"All very fine; but your horses should have been here half an hour ago," growled Dubarry, stamping with his foot, as he looked at his arm, pierced through and through, which Chon was binding up with her handkerchief. Meantime Philippe had mounted his horse again, and was giving his orders as if nothing had occurred.

"Now, brother, now! let us go," said Chon, leading Dubarry toward the carriage.

"And my Arabian?" said he. "Ah! let him go to the devil; I am in for a day of ill-luck," and he got into the carriage.

"Oh!" said he, perceiving Gilbert, "I cannot stretch my legs with this fellow here."

"Let me out," said Gilbert, "and I will walk."

"In the devil's name go, then!" replied Jean.

"No, no," said Chon, "I must keep my little philosopher. Sit opposite me, and you will not annoy him;" and she held Gilbert by the arm. Then, bending forward, she whispered to her brother, "He knows the man who wounded you."

A gleam of joy flashed from the viscount's eyes. "Oh, very well! — let him stay. What is the fellow's name?"

"Philippe de Taverney."

Just then the younger officer passed the carriage.

"Oh! you are there, my little gendarme," shouted the viscount. "You are very proud just now, but my turn will come some day."

"We will see about that, Monsieur, whenever you please," answered Philippe calmly.

"Yes, yes, we shall see about that, Monsieur Philippe de Taverney," said the viscount, leaning forward to see what effect the unexpected mention of his name would have on the young man.

Philippe looked up with surprise, and indeed with a slight feeling of uneasiness; but immediately recovering his self-possession, and taking off his hat with the utmost grace. "A pleasant journey, Monsieur Jean Dubarry," said he.

The carriage rolled on rapidly. "Thousand devils!"

said the viscount, making a horrible grimace; "do you know, my little Chon, I am suffering dreadful pain?"

"At the first place where we change I shall summon a doctor for you, while this poor fellow breakfasts," replied Chon.

"Ah! true, true, — we have not breakfasted; but the pain I suffer takes away my appetite. I am only thirsty."

"Will you drink a glass of wine from my flask?"

"Faith, yes! give it me."

"Monsieur," said Gilbert, "will you allow me to remark that wine is very bad for you in your present condition?"

"Ah, indeed!" said the viscount; then turning to Chon, he asked, "Is your little philosopher a physician, then?"

"No, Monsieur," said Gilbert, "I am not a physician; if it please God I shall be one some time. I have read, however, in a treatise written for people in the army, that the first things forbidden the wounded are spirits, wine, and coffee."

"Ah, you read that! Well, we will say no more about it."

"But if M. le Vicomte would permit me to take his handkerchief and dip it in that brook, and then wrap it round his arm, I am sure it would ease his pain."

"Do, do!" said Chon. "Stop, postilion!"

Gilbert got out to dip the viscount's handkerchief in the brook.

"This boy will be a horrid plague to us," said the viscount; "I have a great mind to tell the postilion to drive on and leave him there with my handkerchief."

"You would be wrong; that boy can be useful to us."

"How so?"

"He has already given me some important information

about the dauphiness; and did he not just now tell you the name of your adversary?"

"True! Well, let him stay."

Gilbert returned; and, as he had predicted, the application of the wet bandage to the viscount's arm relieved him greatly.

"Faith, he was right! I feel much better," said Jean; "let us have a little chat."

Gilbert closed his eyes and opened his ears. But his attentiveness did him no good. Chon replied to her brother's invitation in the lively and brilliant patois of Provence, unintelligible to Parisian ears. Gilbert, master of himself as he was, could not avoid a slight movement of impatience, which was noticed by Mademoiselle Chon, who, to console him, gave him a gentle smile. This smile reminded the poor boy of the kindness with which he was treated. Circumstances had brought him in contact with a nobleman honored with the royal favor. "Ah," thought he, "if Andrée saw me in this magnificent carriage!" — and his heart swelled with pride. As to Nicole, he no longer thought of her.

In the mean time the brother and sister resumed their conversation in the Provençal dialect. Suddenly the viscount leaned out and looked back. "Good!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?"

"The Arabian horse is following us."

"What Arabian horse?"

"The one I tried to buy."

"Hold!" said Chon; "it is ridden by a woman. Oh, the magnificent creature!"

"Of whom are you speaking, — the woman, or the horse?"

"Of the woman."

"Call her, Chon; she will not perhaps be so much afraid of you. I would give a thousand crowns for the horse."

"And how much for the woman?" said Chon, laughing.

"I would give all I have for her. But call her."

"Madame!" cried Chon, "Madame!"

But the stranger appeared not to hear, or not to understand. Wrapped in a long white mantle, and her face shaded by a large beaver hat with drooping feathers, she flew past them like an arrow, crying: "Avanti, Djerid, avanti!"

"She is an Italian," said the viscount. "*Mordieu*, what a splendid woman! If it were not for the pain of my arm, I would jump out and run after her."

"I know her," said Gilbert.

"Why, the little fellow is a directory for the whole province," said the viscount; "he knows every one."

"Who is she?" asked Chon.

"Her name is Lorenza, and she is the sorcerer's wife."

"What sorcerer?"

"The Baron Joseph Balsamo."

The brother and sister looked at each other with an expression which said, "We did well to keep him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COMTESSE DUBARRY'S MORNING LEVEE.

WHILE Mademoiselle Chon and Vicomte Jean are travelling post on the Châlons road, let us introduce the reader to another member of the same family.

In the suite of rooms at Versailles which the Princess Adélaïde, daughter of Louis XV., had once occupied, his Majesty had installed his mistress, the Comtesse Dubarry, — not without studying beforehand the effect which this proceeding would produce on his court. The favorite, with her merry whims and her careless, joyous humor, had transformed that wing of the palace, formerly so quiet, into a scene of perpetual merriment and tumult; and every hour she issued thence her commands for a banquet or a party of pleasure.

But what appeared still more unusual on these magnificent staircases was the never-ceasing stream of visitors ascending them to wait humbly in an antechamber filled with curiosities, but containing nothing so curious as the idol whom they had come to adore.

On the morning following the day on which occurred in the little village of Lachaussée the incident which we have just described, at about nine o'clock (that is, at the customary hour), Jeanne de Vaubernier, in a robe of embroidered muslin which disclosed beneath fleecy lace-work her rounded limbs and her alabaster arms, — Jeanne de Vaubernier, who was afterward Mademoiselle Lange, and finally Comtesse Dubarry, by grace of M. Jean Dubarry,

her former protector, arose from her bed, we will not say like Venus, but certainly more beautiful than Venus for every man who prefers what is real to what is imaginary.

Locks of a light auburn hue, beautifully curled, a skin of white satin veined with blue, eyes by turns languishing and animated, a small mouth of vermilion color pencilled with the purest carmine, which on opening disclosed a double row of pearls, dimples everywhere, in cheeks, chin, and fingers, a throat modelled after that of the Vénus de Milo, the suppleness of a serpent together with a plumpness exactly proportioned, — this is what Madame Dubarry was preparing to exhibit to the elect at her little levee; this is what his Majesty, the elect by night, did not fail to seek in the morning, as did the others, in obedience to the maxim which counsels old people not to permit the crumbs which fall from the table of life to go to waste.

The favorite had been awake for some time. At eight o'clock she had rung for some one to allow the daylight, her earliest courtier, to enter gradually her chamber, first through thick curtains, and then through those of lighter texture. The sun, radiant this morning, had been introduced, and in memory of its pleasing mythological fortunes had come to caress this beautiful nymph, who, instead of fleeing, like Daphne, the love of the gods, was human enough to meet half-way sometimes the love of mortals. There were, then, no signs of recent slumber in the eyes, brilliant as carbuncles, which smilingly questioned a little hand-mirror circled with gold and set with pearls. The lithe form of which we have tried to present some idea glided from the bed whereon it had reposed, lulled by sweetest dreams, to the carpet of ermine, where feet that would have done honor to Cinderella met hands

holding two slippers, either one of which would have made rich a woodcutter in Jeanne's native forest if he perchance could have found it. While the seductive form was rising, and becoming more and more alive, over its shoulders was thrown a magnificent mantle of Malines lace; then upon the plump feet, withdrawn for a moment from the slippers, were drawn silk stockings of a tissue so fine that they could hardly be distinguished from the skin they covered.

"No news of Chon?" the countess asked, addressing her maid.

"No, Madame."

"Nor of the viscount?"

"No, Madame."

"Do you know whether Bischi has received any news?"

"A messenger was sent to your sister's, Madame, this morning, but there were no letters."

"It is very tiresome waiting in this way," said the countess, pouting her lovely mouth. "Will a way never be found to communicate in a moment over a hundred leagues' distance? Ah! I pity all who may come near me to-day. Is my antechamber passably filled this morning?"

"Can Madame think it necessary to ask?"

"Perhaps not; but listen, Dorée: the dauphiness is coming, and it would not be surprising if I should be abandoned for that sun, — I, who am only a little twinkling star. But tell me, who is there this morning?"

"The Duc d'Aiguillon, Madame, the Prince de Soubise, Monsieur de Sartines, the President Maupeou — "

"And the Duc de Richelieu?"

"Not yet, Madame."

"Neither to-day nor yesterday? I told you so, Dorée; he is afraid of compromising himself. You must send

one of my servants to the Hôtel de Hanovre to inquire if the duke be ill."

"Yes, Madame; will you receive all who are waiting at once, or do you wish to give any one a private audience?"

"Monsieur de Sartines first; I must speak to him alone."

The order was transmitted by the countess's woman to a tall footman who waited in the corridor leading from her bed-chamber to the anterooms, and the lieutenant of police immediately appeared, dressed in black, and endeavoring by an insinuating smile to moderate the severe expression of his gray eyes and thin lips.

"Good morning, my dear enemy!" said the countess, without looking round, but seeing him in the mirror before her.

"Your enemy, Madame!"

"Yes; my world is divided into two classes, — friends and enemies. I admit no neutrals, or class them as enemies."

"And you are right, Madame; but tell me how I, notwithstanding my well-known devotion to your interests, deserve to be classed as neutral or hostile."

"By allowing to be printed, distributed, sold, and sent to the king an ocean of pamphlets, libels, verses, — all against me. It is ill-natured, it is odious, it is stupid!"

"But, Madame, I am not responsible — "

"Yes, Monsieur, you are; for you know the wretch who wrote them."

"Madame, if they were all written by one author, we should not have the trouble of sending him to the Bastille; Hercules himself would sink under such a labor!"

"Upon my word, you are highly complimentary to me!"

"If I were your enemy, Madame, I should not speak the truth thus."

"Well, I believe you! — we understand each other now. But one thing still gives me some uneasiness."

"What is that, Madame?"

"You are on good terms with the Choiseuls."

"Madame, M. de Choiseul is prime minister; he issues his orders, and I must obey them."

"So if Monsieur de Choiseul orders that I am to be vexed, tortured, worried to death, you will allow me to be vexed, tortured, worried! Thank you!"

"Let us discuss matters a little," said Sartines, sitting down, without being asked to do so, but without eliciting any sign of displeasure on the part of the favorite, — for much must be pardoned to the man who knew better than any other all that was doing in France. "Let us discuss this a little. What have I done for you in these last three days?"

"You informed me that a courier had been sent from Chanteloup to hasten the arrival of the dauphiness."

"Was that done like an enemy?"

"But about the presentation, on which you know my heart is set, — what have you been doing for me?"

"All that I possibly could."

"Monsieur de Sartines, you are not candid!"

"Ah, Madame, I assure you, you are unjust! Did I not find and bring you Vicomte Jean from the back room of a tavern in less than two hours, when you wanted him in order to send him I don't know where, — or rather, I do know where."

"I had much rather you had allowed my brother-in-law to stay there," said Madame Dubarry, laughing, — "a man allied to the royal family of France!"

"Well, but was that not a service to be added to my many other services?"

"Oh, very well! So much for three days ago, and so much for day before yesterday; now tell me what you did for me yesterday."

"Yesterday, Madame!"

"Oh! you may well endeavor to recollect; that was your day for obliging others."

"I don't understand you, Madame."

"Well, I understand myself. Answer, Monsieur, what were you doing yesterday?"

"Yesterday morning I was occupied as usual, writing with my secretary."

"Till what hour?"

"Till ten."

"What did you do then?"

"I sent to invite a friend of mine from Lyons, who had made a wager that he would come to Paris without my knowledge, and for whom one of my lackeys was waiting at the barrier."

"Well, after dinner?"

"I sent to the Austrian lieutenant of police information of the haunt of a famous robber whom he could not discover."

"And who was —"

"At Vienna."

"So you do police duty, not for Paris only, but for foreign courts?"

"Yes, Madame, in my leisure moments."

"Well, I shall take a note of that. Then, after having despatched the courier to Vienna?"

"I went to the opera."

"To see the little Guimard? Poor Soubise!"

"No, — to arrest a famous pickpocket, whom I did not

disturb so long as he kept to the farmers-general, but who had the audacity to rob two or three noblemen."

"You should say 'the indiscretion.' Well, after the opera?"

"After the opera?"

"Yes. That is a rather puzzling question, is it not?"

"No. After the opera? Let me think—"

"Ah! it seems that now your memory fails."

"Oh! after the opera— Yes, I remember."

"Well?"

"I went to the house of a certain lady who keeps a gaming-table, and I myself conducted her to For-l'Evêque."

"In her carriage?"

"No in a fiacre."

"Well?"

"Well, that is all."

"No, it is not all!"

"I got into my fiacre again."

"And whom did you find in it?"

M. de Sartines changed color.

"Oh!" cried the countess, clapping her little hands, "I have really had the honor of making a minister of police blush!"

"Madame—" stammered Sartines.

"Well, I will tell you who was in the fiacre; it was the Duchesse de Grammont!"

"The Duchesse de Grammont?"

"Yes, the Duchesse de Grammont,—who came to ask you to contrive to get her admitted to the king's private apartments."

"Faith, Madame!" said the minister, moving uneasily in his chair, "I may give up my portfolio to you. It is you who manage the police of Paris, not I."

"To tell the truth, Monsieur, I have a police of my own. So beware! Oh, the Duchesse de Grammont in a fiacre with the minister of police at midnight! It was capital! Do you know what I did?"

"No; but I am afraid it was something dreadful! Fortunately, the hour was very late."

"Yes; but that doesn't help you. Night is the time for vengeance!"

"And what, then, did you do?"

"As I keep a police of my own, I keep a body of writers also, — shocking, ragged, hungry scribblers!"

"Hungry? You must feed them badly."

"I don't feed them at all. If they became fat, they would be as stupid as the Prince de Soubise. Fat, we are told, absorbs the gall."

"Go on; you make me shudder!"

"I recollected all the disagreeable things you have allowed the Choiseuls to do against me, and determined to be revenged. I gave my legion of famishing Apollos the following programme: First, Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as a lawyer, visiting an innocent young girl who lives in a garret, and giving her on the thirtieth of every month a wretched pittance of a hundred crowns."

"Madame, that is a benevolent action which you are endeavoring to misconstrue."

"It is only such actions which can be misconstrued. Second, Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as a reverend missionary, introducing himself into the convent of the Carmelites of the Rue St.-Antoine."

"I was taking those good nuns some news from the Indies."

"East, or West? Third, Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as lieutenant of the police, driving through the

streets at midnight in a fiacre with the Duchesse de Grammont."

"No, Madame!" exclaimed he. "No, — you would not bring such ridicule on my administration!"

"Why, do you not bring ridicule on mine?" said the countess, laughing; "but wait! I set my rogues to work, and they began, like boys at college, with exordium, narration, and amplification; and I have received this morning an epigram, a song, and a ballad, of which you are the subject."

"Ah, my God!"

"Frightful, all three of them! I amused the king with them this morning, and also with the new *Pater noster* which you have allowed to circulate. You know what it is: 'Our Father who art at Versailles, dishonored be thy name, as it deserves to be. Thy kingdom is in disorder; thy will is not done on the earth any more than it is in heaven. Give us our daily bread, which thy favorites have taken from us. Forgive thy parliaments, which uphold thine interests, as we forgive thy ministers who have sold them. Yield not to the seductions of the Dubarry, and deliver us from thy devil of a chancellor. Amen.'"

"Where in the world did you find that?" asked M. de Sartines, clasping his hands.

"Oh! I had no need to find it; some one has the politeness to send me every day the best things in that line as they come out. I have even supposed that it is you who have done me that honor."

"Oh, Madame!"

"And so, by way of reciprocity, to-morrow you will receive the epigram, the song, and the ballad I have mentioned."

"Why not to-day?"

"I must have some time first to distribute them. Is

not that the way? Besides, the police ought always to hear last about any new affair. I assure you, you will be very much amused! I laughed three quarters of an hour at them this morning, and the king was made ill with laughing; it is that which makes him so late."

"I am ruined!" cried Sartines, beating his head with his hands.

"Ruined? Nonsense! You are only celebrated in song. Am I ruined by all the verses made on me? No; I only get in a passion at them, and then for revenge I determine to put somebody else in a passion too. Ah, what delightful verses! I was so pleased with them that I ordered some white wine for my literary scorpions, and I suppose that by this time they are dead drunk."

"Ah, Countess, Countess!"

"But, *pardieu*, you must hear the epigram, —

"'O France! how wretched is thy fate,
When women hold the helm of state!'

No, no, — I am wrong; that is what you have allowed to be circulated against me. But there are so many, I confound them. Listen, listen! here it is: —

"'A perfumer once sought of a painter a sign.
His skill than his genius was duller;
For in a huge bottle, with knavish design,
He makes Boynes, Maupeou, and Terray to shine,
Displayed in their own proper color.
But for Sartines still room in the vessel he leaves,
And he labels the mixture "The Essence of Thieves."'"

"Cruel woman, you will drive me mad!" cried Sartines.

"Now we must look at the song. You must know it is Madame de Grammont who speaks: —

"'Dear minister, you know my skin
Is to the purest snow akin;
Then grant to me this single thing, —
Oh, say so, say so, to the king!'"

"Madame, Madame!" cried Sartines, more furious than ever.

"Oh! don't be disturbed," said the countess; "I have had only ten thousand copies printed. But you ought to hear the ballad."

"You have a press, then?"

"Certainly. Has not the Duc de Choiseul one?"

"Let your printer take care!"

"Oh, it is kept in my own name! I am the printer."

"Shocking, shocking! And the king laughs at these infamies!"

"Laughs? He sometimes gives me rhymes himself, when my spiders give out."

"You know how I serve you, and you treat me thus!"

"I know that you are betraying me. The Duchesse de Grammont is a Choiseul; she wishes to ruin me."

"Madame, I declare to you she took me by surprise!"

"You confess, then, that I was informed correctly?"

"I am forced to confess it."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I came now for that purpose."

"I don't believe you."

"Upon my honor!"

"I bet two to one against it."

"Behold me at your feet!" and he fell on his knees "I beg forgiveness!"

"You do well."

"Let us make peace, Countess, in Heaven's name!"

"So you are afraid of a few bad verses, — you, a man, a minister!"

"Ah! if I had only that to fear!"

"And you never reflect how many wretched hours such things make me spend, — me, a woman!"

"You are a queen."

"A queen, not presented at court!"

"I swear to you I have never done anything hurtful to your interests!"

"No; but you have allowed others to do so. The matter, however, is now not the doing nothing against them, but the doing all in your power to forward them. Are you on my side, — yes, or no?"

"Certainly, on your side."

"Will your devotion go so far as to help on my presentation?" asked the countess.

"You yourself shall fix its limits."

"Remember, my press is in order; it works night and day. In twenty-four hours my scribblers will be hungry; and when they are hungry they bite."

"I will be good. What do you wish?"

"That nothing which I undertake shall be opposed."

"For myself, I promise everything."

"No," said the countess, stamping with her foot. "Punic faith! I will not accept that; there is a loop-hole in it for you to crawl out. You will be supposed to do nothing against me yourself, but the Duc de Choiseul will do all. All or nothing. Give me up the Choiseuls, bound hand and foot, or I will destroy you, annihilate you! Take care! Verses are not my only weapons!"

"Do not threaten me, Madame," said Sartines, thoughtfully; "there are difficulties about this presentation which you cannot understand."

"Obstacles have purposely been thrown in the way of it. You can remove them."

"I am only one person; we need a hundred."

"You shall have a million!"

"The king will not give his consent."

"He will give it!"

"And when you have got it, you will need a lady to present you."

"I am seeking for one now."

"It is useless; there is a league against you."

"At Versailles?"

"Yes. All the ladies have refused, in order to pay their court to the Duc de Choiseul, the Duchesse de Grammont, the dauphiness, — the party of prudes, in short."

"Do not fear; I have nearly obtained what I want."

"Ha! it was for that you sent your sister to Verdun!"

"So you know that, do you?" said she, angrily.

"Oh, I have also my police, you know!" said Sartines, laughing.

"And your spies?"

"And my spies."

"In my apartments?"

"In your apartments."

"In my stable, or in my kitchen?"

"In your antechamber, in your salon, in your bedroom, under your pillow."

"Now, as the first pledge of our peace," said the countess, "give me the names of those spies."

"No, Countess; I should not wish to embroil you with your friends."

"But name only the last who told you a secret."

"What would you do?"

"I would turn him out."

"If you begin in that way, you will soon have to live in an empty house."

"This is frightful!"

"Yet perfectly true. Oh, you know we could not govern without spies! So excellent a politician as you must have discovered that long ago."

Madame Dubarry leaned her elbow on a table, and seemed to reflect for some minutes; then she said, "You are right. Let us say no more on the subject. What are to be the conditions of our treaty?"

"Make them yourself. You are the conqueror."

"I am as magnanimous as Semiramis. Let me hear what you wish."

"Well, then, you are never to speak to the king about petitions on the subject of wheat; for, traitress! you have promised your support to those petitions."

"Very well. Take away all the petitions with you; they are in a box there."

"Take in exchange this document, drawn up by the peers of the kingdom, respecting presentations and the right of sitting in the royal presence."

"A document which you were charged to give his Majesty?"

"Yes."

"But what will you say to them?"

"That I have given it. You will thus gain time; and you are too clever in your tactics not to take advantage of it."

At this moment the folding-doors were thrown open, and an usher announced, "The king!"

The two allies hastened to hide their mutual pledges of peace and good understanding, and turned to salute his Majesty, Louis XV.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KING LOUIS THE FIFTEENTH.

THE king entered with head erect, with a firm step, his eye full of life, and a smile on his lips. As the doors were opened, a double file of bowing heads was seen, belonging to the courtiers, who had been long waiting in the antechamber, and who were now more desirous of admittance than ever, since they could thus pay their court to two powers at once; but the doors closed on them, for the king made a sign that no one should follow him. He found himself alone, therefore, with the countess and the minister of police; for we need make no account of the waiting-maid or a little negro who was in attendance.

"Good-morning, Countess!" said the king, kissing Madame Dubarry's hand. "Ha! fresh as any rose, I see! Good-morning, Sartines! Is this your cabinet, where you write your despatches? Heavens, what heaps of papers! Hide them, hide them! Ha! what a beautiful fountain, Countess!" And with the versatile curiosity of one always in search of something to amuse him, he fixed his eyes on a large china ornament, which had been brought in since the evening before, and placed in a corner of the countess's bedroom.

"Sire," replied the countess, "it is a Chinese fountain. On turning this cock, the water comes out and makes these birds sing and these fishes swim; then the doors of the pagoda open, and there comes out a procession of mandarins."

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed!"

At this moment the little negro walked across the room, dressed in the fantastic fashion in which, at this period, they dressed their Osmans and Othellos. He wore a little turban, ornamented with a lofty plume of feathers, on one side of his head, a vest embroidered with gold, which permitted his ebony arms to be seen, and slashed breeches of white brocaded satin; round his waist was a scarf of various bright colors, which connected the breeches with a richly embroidered jacket; and a dagger, ornamented with precious stones, was stuck in the scarf bound around his waist.

"*Peste!*" cried the king, "how splendid Zamore is to-day!"

The negro stopped to admire himself before a mirror.

"Sire, he has a favor to ask of your Majesty."

"Madame," replied the king, with a courtly smile, "I am afraid Zamore is very ambitious."

"How so, Sire?"

"Because he has already been granted the greatest favor he can desire."

"What is that?"

"The same that has been granted me."

"I do not understand you, Sire."

"You have made him your slave."

The minister of police bowed, smiling, and bit his lip at the same time.

"Oh, how charming you are, Sire!" cried the countess. Then, leaning toward the king, she said, in a low tone, "France, I adore thee!"

The king smiled in his turn. "Well," he asked, "what do you want for Zamore?"

"The reward of his long and numerous services."

"Yes; he is twelve years old."

"His long and numerous future services."

"Oh, very well!"

"Yes, indeed, Sire. Past services have been rewarded long enough; it is now time to begin rewarding those of the future. There would not then be so much ingratitude."

"Ha! not a bad idea," said the king. "What do you think of it, Sartines?"

"That it would benefit all devoted servants of your majesty, Sire; therefore I support it."

"Well, Countess, come, what do you ask for Zamore?"

"Sire, you know my little country seat of Luciennes?"

"I have heard it spoken of only."

"It is your own fault; I have invited you to it a hundred times."

"You know the etiquette, dear Countess: unless on a journey, the king can sleep only in a royal château."

"Exactly; this is the favor which I have to ask. We will make Luciennes a royal château, and we will appoint Zamore to be its governor."

"But, Countess, that would be a burlesque."

"I love burlesques, Sire."

"The governors of the other castles would all cry out, — and this time with reason."

"So much the better; they have so often cried out without reason. Kneel down, Zamore, and thank his Majesty."

"And what for?" asked Louis XV.

The negro knelt.

"For the reward you are going to give him for bearing my train, and putting all the prudes of the court in a rage."

"He is really a hideous creature," said the king, bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Rise, Zamore," said the countess; "you are appointed governor of Luciennes."

"But indeed, Madame —"

"I shall send Zamore all the writings necessary for his governorship. And now, Sire, you may come to Luciennes; you have one more royal château from this day."

"Is there any way of refusing her anything, Sartines?"

"There may be a way, Sire," replied Sartines; "but it has not yet been discovered."

"And if it should be found out, Sire, there is one thing certain: it is M. de Sartines who will be the discoverer."

"How can you think so, Madame?" asked Sartines, trembling.

"Sire, only imagine that I have requested a favor of M. de Sartines for three months past, and it is not yet granted."

"And what is it?" asked the king.

"Oh, he knows very well!"

"I! I swear to you, Madame —"

"Does it fall within the duties of his office?"

"Yes; within either his or those of his successor."

"Madame," cried Sartines, "you really make me uneasy.'

"What is the request?" again inquired the king.

"To find me a sorcerer."

Sartines breathed more freely.

"To burn him?" asked the king. "It is rather too hot, Countess; wait till the winter."

"No, Sire; I wish to present him with a golden wand."

"Then the sorcerer foretold you some misfortune which has not befallen you."

"On the contrary, Sire, he predicted a piece of good-fortune which has come to pass."

"Let us hear it then, Countess," said the king, throwing himself back in an arm-chair, like one who is not

quite sure whether he is to be amused or bored, but takes the chance.

"With all my heart; but if I tell the tale, you must contribute the half of the sorcerer's reward."

"The whole, if you like!"

"Royally said. Now listen."

"I am all attention."

"There was once —"

"It begins like a fairy tale."

"It is one, Sire."

"Delightful; I adore enchanters!"

"There was once a poor young girl who at the time my story begins had neither page, nor carriage, nor negro, nor parrot, nor monkey —"

"Nor king," added Louis.

"Oh, Sire!"

"And what did the poor young girl do?"

"She trotted about through the streets of Paris like any other common mortal, only she always went very quick; for it is said she was very pretty, and she was afraid of meeting some rude man."

"The young girl was a Lucretia, eh?"

"Oh! your Majesty knows there have been no Lucretias since the year — I don't know what — of the foundation of Rome."

"Oh, heavens! Countess, are you going to become learned?"

"No; if I were learned, I should have given you a wrong date, but I have given you none."

"True," said the king; "go on."

"The young girl one day was trotting along, as usual, when all at once, while crossing the Tuileries, she discovered that a man was following her."

"Oh, the deuce! Then she stopped, I presume."

"Ah, Sire, what a bad opinion you have of women! It is easily seen that you have associated with only marchionesses and duchesses."

"And princesses?"

"I am too polite to contradict your Majesty. But what frightened the young girl was that a fog came on, which became every moment denser."

"Sartines, do you know what causes fogs?"

The minister, thus taken unawares, started.

"Faith! no, Sire."

"Nor I. Well, go on, dear Countess."

"She ran as fast as she could, passed through the gate, and found herself in the square which bears your Majesty's name, when she met the unknown, from whom she thought she had escaped, face to face. She uttered a cry —"

"Was he so very ugly, then?"

"No, Sire; he was a handsome young man, of twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, of a dark complexion, with large, speaking eyes, and a pleasing voice."

"And the heroine was afraid? *Peste!* how easily she was frightened!"

"She was not quite so much so when she looked at him; still, it was not a pleasant situation in that dense fog. So, clasping her hands, she said: 'I implore you, Monsieur, not to do me any harm.' The unknown shook his head, smiled, and replied, 'Heaven is my witness, I have no such intention.' 'What, then, do you want?' I asked. 'To obtain a promise from you.' 'What can I promise you, Monsieur?' 'Promise to grant me the first favor I shall ask when —' 'When?' repeated the young girl, with curiosity. 'When you are queen.'"

"And what did the young girl do?" said the king.

"Sire, she thought it would be engaging herself to *nothing;* she promised."

"And what became of the sorcerer?"

"He disappeared."

"And Sartines refuses to find him? He is wrong."

"Sire, I do not refuse; but I cannot find him."

"Oh, Monsieur," said the countess, "that word *cannot* should never be in the dictionary of the police."

"Madame, we are on his track."

"Yes, — what you always say when you are baffled."

"It is the truth; but consider what trivial directions you have given."

"What! — trivial? — young, handsome, dark complexion, black hair, splendid eyes, a sonorous voice."

"Oh, the devil! how you speak of him, Countess! Sartines, I forbid you to find that young man," said the king.

"You are wrong, Sire; for I only wish to ask one simple question."

"Is it about yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it? His prediction is accomplished."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; you are queen."

"Very nearly."

"What has the sorcerer, then, to tell you more?"

"He has to tell me when the queen will be presented. It is not enough to reign at night, Sire; it is necessary to reign a little also by day."

"That does not concern the sorcerer," said the king, with a grimace which showed that he thought they were getting on dangerous ground.

"And whose concern is it?"

"Your own."

"Mine?"

"Yes; you must find a lady to present you."

"Oh! very likely, among the prudes of the court! Your Majesty knows that it is impossible; they are all sold to Choiseul and Praslin."

"What! was there not an agreement made between us that the ministers should never be named here?"

"I did not promise, Sire."

"Well, I beg you to leave them where they are, and remain where you are. Believe me, the best place is yours."

"Alas, then, for the administration of foreign affairs and the navy!"

"Countess," interrupted the king, "in Heaven's name, no politics!"

At this moment Dorée entered, and whispered a word or two in her mistress's ear.

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" she cried.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"Chon, Sire, who has just returned from a journey, and wishes to pay her respects to your Majesty."

"Let her come in, let her come in! Indeed, for some days past I felt that I wanted something, without knowing exactly what it was."

"Thanks, Sire!" said Chon as she entered; then, going up to her sister, she whispered, "It is all settled!"

The countess uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Well, what now?" asked the king.

"Nothing, Sire, — only that I am glad to see her again."

"I am glad too. How do you do, little Chon?"

"May I say a word or two, Sire, to my sister?"

"Yes, yes, child; and while you are talking together, I will ask Sartines where you have been."

"Sire," said the minister, wishing to avoid being questioned on that point, "may I beg your Majesty to

allow me a few moments on business of the utmost importance?"

"Oh! I have very little time now, M. de Sartines," said the king, beginning to yawn.

"Only two words, your Majesty."

"About what?"

"About those people with the second sight, — those illuminati, those workers of miracles."

"Pooh! jugglers! Give them permission to exercise their trade, and there will be nothing to fear from them."

"The matter is more serious than your Majesty supposes. Every day we have new masonic lodges formed. They are now a powerful sect, attracting to them all the enemies of monarchy, — the philosophers, the encyclopedists. Voltaire is to be received by them in great state."

"He? He is dying."

"He, Sire! Oh, no, Sire; he is not such a fool!"

"He has confessed."

"Merely a trick."

"In the habit of a Capuchin."

"That was an impiety, Sire. But with regard to these freemasons, they are always active; they write, they talk, they form associations, correspond with foreign countries; they intrigue, they threaten. Just now they are expecting the arrival of a great chief or head of the whole body, as I have learned from some words which escaped from one of their number."

"Well, Sartines, when this chief comes, catch him and put him in the Bastille, and the whole affair is settled."

"Sire, these persons have great resources."

"Have they greater than you, Monsieur, who have the whole police of a kingdom?"

"Your Majesty was induced to expel the Jesuits; it was the philosophers whom you should have expelled."

"Come, come! — no more about those poor quill-drivers!"

"Sire, those quills are dangerous which are cut by the penknife of Damiens."

Louis XV. turned pale.

"These philosophers, Sire, whom you despise — "

"Well, Monsieur?"

"Will destroy the monarchy, Sire."

"How much time do they need for that, Monsieur?"

Sartines stared at this coolness. "How can I tell, Sire? Perhaps fifteen, twenty, or thirty years."

"Well, my dear friend, in fifteen or twenty years I shall be no more; so talk of all these things to my successor." And the king turned to Madame Dubarry, who, seeming to have waited for this movement, said, with a heavy sigh, "Oh, heavens! what is it you tell me, Chon?"

"Yes, what is it?" asked the king; "for you both look very miserable."

"Oh, Sire, there is good cause for it!"

"Speak; let me hear what has happened."

"My poor brother!"

"Poor Jean!"

"Do you think it must be cut off?"

"They hope not."

"Cut off! What?" asked the king.

"His arm, Sire!"

"Cut off the viscount's arm! What for?"

"Because he has been seriously wounded."

"Wounded in the arm?"

"Oh, yes, Sire."

"Aye, in some drunken squabble in a filthy tavern."

"No, Sire; on the highway."

"But how did that happen?"

"It happened that some one wished to assassinate him, that is all."

"Ah, the poor viscount!" exclaimed the king, who had very little feeling for the sufferings of others, although he could look wonderfully compassionate. "To assassinate him! This is a serious matter, is it not, Sartines?"

The minister looked much less moved than the king, but was in reality a great deal more uneasy on the subject. He drew near the sisters. "Can it be possible?" asked he, anxiously, "that such a misfortune has occurred?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur, it is but too possible," said Chon, very mournfully.

"Assassinated! But how?"

"He was waylaid."

"Waylaid? Ha! Sartines, this is an affair for you," said the king.

"Relate all the circumstances, Madame," said the minister, "and do not, I entreat you, allow your just resentment to exaggerate them. In being strictly just we shall be the more severe; and where things are looked at closely and coolly, they are often not so very serious as we at first apprehended."

"Oh!" cried Chon, "this is not an affair which has been related to me; I saw the whole with my own eyes."

"Well, but what did you see, Chon?" inquired the king.

"I saw a man fall on my brother, and, having forced him to draw in self-defence, wound him shockingly."

"Was the man alone?" asked Sartines.

"No, indeed, he had six others with him."

"The poor viscount!" said the king, looking at the countess, that he might know exactly what degree of grief to exhibit, — "forced to fight, poor fellow!"

But seeing that she did not relish this pleasantry, "And he was wounded?" he added, in a compassionate voice.

"But what was the quarrel about?" asked the minister of police, trying, if possible, to betray her into telling the truth.

"Oh, the merest trifle! It was about post-horses, which I wanted in order to hasten back to my sister, as I had promised to be with her this morning."

"Ha! Sartines, this merits punishment, does it not?" said the king.

"I think it does, Sire, and I shall get together all the facts. What was the name of the aggressor, Madame, his condition, his rank?"

"His rank? He is a military man, — an officer in the bodyguard of the dauphin, I think. As to his name, he is called Baverney, Faverney, Taverney, — yes, Taverney, that is it."

"Madame, to-morrow he shall lie in the Bastille."

"Oh, no!" said the countess, who until now had very diplomatically kept silence; "oh, no!"

"Why, oh no?" asked the king; "why should not the fellow be imprisoned? You know I detest the military."

"And I repeat, Sire," said the countess, doggedly, "that I am quite sure nothing will be done to the man who assassinated the viscount."

"Ha, Countess, this is very curious. Explain it, if you please."

"That is easily done; he will be protected."

"And who will protect him?"

"The person at whose instance he acted."

"And that person will protect him against us? Oh, that is rather too much, Countess!"

"Madame —" stammered the Comte de Sartines, for he

felt that a blow was coming, and he was not prepared to ward it off.

"Yes!" exclaimed the countess, "he will be protected against you, and there will be nothing said. Do you suppose you are the master, Sire?"

The king felt the blow which the minister had foreseen, and braced himself.

"I see that you are going to plunge into politics," said he, "and find out some reasons of state for a paltry duel!"

"There, now! you abandon me already; the assassination has become nothing but a duel, now that you suspect the quarter whence it comes!"

"So! I am in for it!" said the king, going to the great Chinese fountain, turning the cock, and making the birds sing, the fishes swim, and the mandarins come out.

"And you don't know who aimed this blow?" asked the countess, pulling the ears of Zamore, who was lying at her feet.

"No, on my word!" said the king.

"Or suspect?"

"I swear I don't. Do you, Countess?"

"No, I don't suspect, I know positively. I am going to tell you, and it will be no news to you, I am certain!"

"Countess, Countess, do you know that you are giving the lie to your king?" and Louis tried to look dignified.

"Sire, I know I am a little warm, but if you think I shall quietly allow my brother to be killed by the Duc de Choiseul —"

"Yes, there it is, — Choiseul again!" exclaimed the king, in a loud voice, as if he had not expected this name, which for the last ten minutes he had been dreading.

"Well, it is because your Majesty is determined not to

see that he is my worst enemy; but I see it plainly, for he does not even take the trouble to hide his hatred from me."

"He is far from hating any one so much that he would cause him to be assassinated, dear Countess."

"To the Choiseuls all things are possible."

"Now, my dear Countess, politics again!"

"Oh, Monsieur de Sartines!" cried she, "is it not dreadful to be treated thus?"

"Why, no, if what you think —"

"I think you are not supporting me; I will say more, — I am sure that you abandon me," cried the countess, with violence.

"Now, do not get angry, Countess," said the king. "Not only will you not be abandoned, you will even be supported; and so well —"

"So well —?"

"So well that he who attacked poor Jean shall pay dearly for it."

"Yes, the instrument will be broken; but the hand that directed it will be kindly pressed!"

"Is it not right to punish this Monsieur Taverney, who actually committed the assault?"

"Oh, certainly! but it is not right that what you do for me is no more than would be done to a soldier who should give a blow to a shopkeeper at the theatre. I warn you, I will not be treated like every one else. If you do no more for those whom you love than for those who are indifferent to you, I prefer the obscurity and isolation of the latter; they at least are not assassinated!"

"Oh, Countess!" said the king, imploringly, "I got up in good spirits, disposed to be gay, happy, and pleased with every one; how you are spoiling my beautiful *morning!*"

"Very fine indeed! It is a delightful morning for me, of course, — for me, whose family are massacred!"

The king, in spite of his internal fears of the terrible storm that was gathering, could not help smiling at the word "massacred." The countess started up in a towering passion. "Ah! is that the way you pity me?" said she.

"Now, now, — do not get angry."

"But I will get angry!"

"You are very wrong; you look lovely when you smile, but anger makes you ugly."

"What matters it to me how I look, when my beauty does not prevent my being sacrificed to state intrigues?"

"Now, my dear Countess —"

"No, no. Choose between me and your Choiseul!"

"Dear creature, it is impossible to choose; you are both necessary to me."

"Well, then, I shall retire, and leave the field to my enemies. I shall die of grief; but the Duc de Choiseul will be satisfied, and that will console you."

"I swear to you, Countess, that he has n't the slightest dislike to you; on the contrary, he admires you. He is an excellent man, after all," added the king, in a louder tone, that the minister of police might hear him.

"An excellent man! Sire, you drive me to desperation. An excellent man, who causes people to be assassinated!"

"Oh!" said the king, "we don't yet know."

"And besides," Sartines ventured to say, "a quarrel, a duel between military men is so common, — so natural!"

"Ha, Monsieur de Sartines! and are you also against me?" cried the countess.

The minister of police understood the weight of this *tu quoque*, and retreated before her anger. There was a moment of deep and ominous silence.

"Ah, Chon!" said the king, in the midst of the general consternation, "you see your handiwork!"

"Your Majesty will pardon me," said she, "if the grief of the sister has made me forget for a moment my duty as a subject."

"Kind creature!" murmured the king. "Come, Countess, forget and forgive!"

"Yes, Sire, I shall forgive; only I shall set out for Luciennes, and thence for Boulogne."

"Boulogne-sur-mer?" asked the king.

"Yes, Sire; I shall quit a kingdom where the king is afraid of his minister."

"Madame!" exclaimed Louis, with an offended air.

"Sire, that I may not any longer be wanting in respect to you, permit me to retire;" and the countess rose, observing with the corner of her eye what effect her movement might produce.

The king gave his usual heavy sigh of weariness, which said plainly, "I am getting rather tired of this." Chon understood what the sigh meant, and saw that it would be dangerous to push matters to extremity. She caught her sister by the gown, and approaching the king, "Sire," said she, "my sister's affection for the poor viscount has carried her too far. It is I who have committed the fault; it is I who must repair it. As the humblest of your Majesty's subjects, I beg from your Majesty justice for my brother. I accuse nobody; your wisdom will discover the guilty."

"Why, that is precisely what I wish myself," said the king, "that justice should be done. If a man has not committed a crime, let him not be reproached with it; but if he has committed it, let him be punished." And Louis looked toward the countess as he spoke, with the *hope of* renewing the expectation he had entertained of an

amusing morning, — a morning which seemed turning out so dismally. The good-natured countess could not help pitying the king, whose want of occupation and emptiness of mind made him feel tired and dispirited except when with her. She turned half round, for she had already made a step toward the door, and said, with the sweetest submission, "Do I wish for anything but justice? Only let not my suspicions be repulsed when I express them."

"Your suspicions are sacred to me, Countess," cried the king; "and if they be changed into certainty, you shall see. But now I think of it, how easy to know the truth! Let the Duc de Choiseul be sent for."

"Oh! your Majesty knows that he never comes into these apartments; he would scorn to do so. His sister, however, is not of his mind, — she wishes for nothing better."

The king laughed. The countess, encouraged by this, added: "The Duc de Choiseul apes the dauphin; he will not compromise his dignity."

"The dauphin is religious, Countess."

"And the duke a hypocrite, Sire."

"I promise you, my dear countess, you shall see him here, for I shall summon him. He must come, as it is on state business, and we shall have all explained in Chon's presence, who saw all. We shall confront them, as the lawyers say, — eh, Sartines? Let some one go for the Duc de Choiseul."

"And let some one bring me my monkey. Dorée, my monkey!" cried the countess.

These words, which were addressed to the waiting-maid, could be heard in the ante-room when the door was opened to despatch the usher for the prime minister; and a broken, lisping voice responded: "The countess's monkey? That means me; I hasten to present myself."

And with these words entered a little hunchback, dressed with great magnificence.

"The Duc de Tresmes!" said the countess, annoyed by his appearance; "I did not summon you, Duke."

"You asked for your monkey, Madame," said the duke, bowing to the king, the countess, and the minister; "and seeing among the courtiers no ape half so ugly as myself, I hastened to obey your call;" and the duke laughed, showing such long teeth that the countess could not help laughing also.

"Shall I stay?" asked the duke, as if that were the favor he had aspired to all his life.

"Ask his Majesty, Duke; he is master here."

The duke turned to the king, with the air of a suppliant.

"Yes, stay, Duke, stay!" said the king, glad to find any additional means of amusement. At this moment the usher threw open the doors.

"Oh!" said the king, with a slight expression of dissatisfaction on his face, "is it the Duc de Choiseul already?"

"No, Sire," replied the usher; "it is Monseigneur the Dauphin, who desires to speak to you."

The countess almost started from her chair with joy, for she imagined the dauphin was about to enter; but Chon, who thought of everything, frowned.

"Well, where is the dauphin, then?" asked the king, impatiently.

"In your Majesty's apartments; his Royal Highness awaits your return."

"It is fated I shall never have a minute's repose," grumbled the king. Then, remembering that the audience demanded by the dauphin might spare him the scene with M. de Choiseul, he thought better of it. "I am

coming," said he, "I am coming. Good-by, Countess. See how I am dragged in all directions!"

"But will your Majesty go just when the Duc de Choiseul is coming?"

"What can I do? The principal slave is the king. Oh, if those rogues of philosophers knew what it is to be a king, — especially a king of France!"

"But, Sire, you can stay."

"Oh! I must not keep the dauphin waiting. People say already that I have no affection except for my daughters."

"But what shall I say to M. de Choiseul?"

"Oh! tell him to come to my apartments, Countess." And to put an end to any further remonstrance, he kissed her hand, and disappeared running, as was his habit whenever he feared to lose a victory gained by his temporizing policy and his petty cunning. The countess trembled with passion, and clasping her hands she exclaimed, "So, he has escaped once more!"

But the king did not hear those words; the door was already closed behind him, and he passed through the ante-rooms, saying to the courtiers, "Go in, gentlemen, go in, the countess will see you; but you will find her very dull, on account of the accident which has befallen poor Vicomte Jean."

The courtiers looked at one another in amazement, for they had not heard of the accident. Many hoped that the viscount was dead, but all assumed the expression of countenance suitable to the occasion. Those who were best pleased looked the most sympathetic, and they entered.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HALL OF CLOCKS.

In that large hall of the palace of Versailles which was called the Hall of Clocks, a young man of rosy complexion, with mild eyes and a somewhat vulgar bearing, walked slowly up and down, with his arms hanging and his head bent forward. He appeared to be about seventeen years of age. On his breast sparkled a diamond star, rendered more brilliant by the dark, violet-colored velvet of his coat; and his white satin waistcoat, embroidered with silver, was crossed by the blue ribbon supporting the cross of St. Louis.

None could fail to recognize that profile, so expressive of dignity and kindliness, which formed the characteristic type of the elder branch of the House of Bourbon, of which this young man was at once the most obvious and the most striking image. In fact, Louis Auguste, Duc de Berry, Dauphin of France, who was afterward Louis XVI., had the Bourbon nose even longer and more aquiline than those of his predecessors. His forehead was lower and more retreating than Louis XV.'s, and the double chin of his grandfather was so remarkable in him that although he was at the time we speak of young and thin, his chin formed nearly one third of the length of his face.

Although well made, he yet seemed constrained in the movement of his legs and shoulders, and his walk was slow and awkward. His arms alone, and especially his fingers, had activity, suppleness, force, and, so to speak,

that physiognomy which in other persons is written on the forehead, the mouth, and the eyes. The dauphin continued to pace in silence the Hall of Clocks, — the same in which, eight years before, Louis XV. had given to Madame de Pompadour the decree of the parliament exiling the Jesuits from the kingdom, — and as he walked he seemed plunged in revery.

At last, however, he seemed to become impatient of waiting there alone, and to amuse himself he began to look at the timepieces, remarking, as Charles V. had done, the differences which are found among the most regular clocks. These differences are a singular but decided manifestation of the inequality existing in all material things, whether regulated or not regulated by the hand of man. He stopped before the large clock at the lower end of the hall — the same place it occupies at present — which by a clever arrangement of machinery marks the days, the months, the years, the phases of the moon, the course of the planets, — in short, all which interests the still more curious machine called man, in the progressive movement of life toward death.

The prince examined this clock with the eye of an amateur, and leaned now to the right, now to the left, to inspect this or that wheel. Then he returned to his place in front, and observed the second-hand moving lightly from second to second, like those flies which, with their long slender legs, skim over the surface of a pond without disturbing the liquid crystal of its waters. This contemplation naturally led him to think that a very great number of seconds had passed while he had been waiting there. It is true also that many had already elapsed before he had ventured to send word to the king that he was waiting for him.

Suddenly the hand on which the young prince's eyes

were fixed stopped as if by enchantment, the wheels ceased their measured rotation, the springs became still, and deep silence took possession of the machine but a moment before so full of noise and motion. No more ticking, no more oscillations, no more movement of the wheels or of the hands. The time-piece had died.

Had some grain of sand, small as an atom, lodged on a tooth of one of the wheels and stopped its movements; or was the genius of the machine resting, wearied by its monotonous activity? Surprised by this sudden death, this stroke of apoplexy occurring before his eyes, the dauphin forgot why he had come thither, and how long he had waited. He forgot, too, that hours are not counted in eternity by the movements of a pendulum, nor arrested even for a moment in their course by the stopping of a wheel, but are recorded on the dial of eternity, established even before the birth of worlds by the unchangeable hand of the Almighty. He opened the glass door of the crystal pagoda, the genius of which had ceased to act, and put his head inside to examine the time-piece more closely. But the large pendulum was in his way; he slipped in his supple fingers and took it off. This was not enough; the cause of the lethargy of the machine was still hidden from him. He then supposed that the person who had the care of the clocks of the palace had forgotten to wind up this time-piece, and he took down the key from a hook and began to wind it up like a man quite accustomed to the business. But he could turn it only three times, — a proof that some accident had happened to the mechanism. He drew from his pocket a little file, and with the end of it pushed one of the wheels; they moved for half a second, then stopped again.

The malady of the clock appeared to be serious; the dauphin therefore began carefully to unscrew several parts of it, laying them all in order on a console beside

him. Then, drawn on by his ardor, he began to take to pieces still more and more of the complicated machine, and to search minutely into its most hidden and mysterious recesses. Suddenly he uttered a cry of joy; he had discovered that a screw which acted on one of the springs had become loose, and had thus impeded the movement of the motive wheel. He immediately began to tighten it; and then, with a wheel in his left hand and his little file in his right, he plunged his head again into the interior of the clock. He was busy at his work, absorbed in contemplation of the mechanism of the time-piece, when a door opened, and a voice announced, "The king!" But the dauphin heard only the melodious sound of that ticking which his hand had reawakened, like the beating of a heart which a clever physician has restored to life.

The king looked around on all sides, but did not see the dauphin immediately, whose head and the upper parts of his body were hidden in the opening, so that his legs alone were visible. He approached, smiling, and tapped his grandson on the shoulder. "What the devil are you doing there?" said he.

The dauphin drew out his head quickly, but at the same time with all the care necessary to avoid doing any harm to the beautiful object which he had undertaken to mend. "Sire, your Majesty sees," he replied, blushing with shame at being surprised in the midst of such occupations, "I was amusing myself while waiting till you should come."

"Yes, in destroying my clock, — a very pretty amusement indeed!"

"Oh no, Sire! I was mending it. The principal wheel would not move, it was prevented by this screw; I have tightened the screw, and now it goes."

"But you will blind yourself with looking into that thing. I would not put my head into such a trap for all the gold in the world."

"Oh! it will do me no harm, Sire; I understand all about it. I always take to pieces, clean, and put together again that beautiful watch which your Majesty gave me on my fourteenth birthday."

"Very well; but stop now, if you please, and leave your mechanics. You wish to speak to me?"

"I, Sire?" said the young man, coloring again.

"Of course, since you sent to say you were waiting for me."

"It is true, Sire," replied the dauphin, with downcast eyes.

"Well, what is it? Answer. If it is of no importance, I must go; for I am just setting off for Marly." Louis XV., as was his custom, already sought to escape.

The dauphin placed his wheel and his file on a chair, which indicated that he had really something important to say, since he interrupted his interesting work for it.

"Do you want money?" asked the king, sharply. "If so, I will send you some;" and he made a step toward the door.

"Oh, no, Sire! I have still a thousand crowns remaining of the sum I received last month."

"What economy!" said the king; "and how well Monsieur de le Vauguyon has educated him! I think he has precisely all the virtues I have not."

The young prince made a violent effort over himself. "Sire," said he, "is the dauphiness yet very far distant?"

"Do you not know as well as I how far off she is?" replied the king.

"I?" the dauphin asked, with embarrassment.

"Of course; you heard the account of her journey read yesterday. Last Monday she was at Nancy, and she ought to be now about forty-five leagues from Paris."

"Sire, does not your Majesty think her Royal Highness travels very slowly?"

"By no means," replied the king; "I think she travels very fast, for a woman. And then, you know, there are the receptions and the rejoicings on the road. She travels at least ten leagues every two days."

"I think it very little, Sire," said the dauphin, timidly.

Louis XV. was more and more astonished at the appearance of impatience, which he had been far from suspecting. "Come, come," said he, smiling slyly, "don't be impatient; your dauphiness will arrive soon."

"Sire, might not these ceremonies on the road be shortened?" continued the dauphin.

"Impossible; she has already passed, without stopping, through two or three towns where she should have made a stay."

"But these delays will be eternal; and then, Sire, I think —" said the dauphin, still more timidly.

"Well, what do you think? Let me hear it; speak!"

"I think that the service is badly performed."

"What do you mean? what service?"

"The service for the journey."

"Nonsense! I sent thirty thousand horses to be ready on the road, thirty carriages, sixty wagons, — I don't know how many carts. If carts, carriages, and horses were put in file, they would reach from here to Strasburg. How then can you think that with all this provision the service is badly performed?"

"Well, Sire, in spite of all your Majesty's goodness, I am almost certain that what I say is true; but perhaps

I have used an improper term, and instead of 'badly performed' I should have said 'badly arranged.'"

The king raised his head and fixed his eyes on the dauphin; he began to comprehend that more was meant than met the ear in the few words which his Royal Highness had spoken.

"Thirty thousand horses," he repeated, "thirty carriages, sixty wagons, two regiments. I ask you, Monsieur le Savant, have you ever before heard of a dauphiness entering France with such an attendance as that?"

"I acknowledge, Sire, that things have been royally done, and as your Majesty alone knows how to do them. But has your Majesty specially ordered that these horses and carriages should be employed solely for her Royal Highness and her train?"

The king looked at his grandson for the third time. A vague suspicion had stung him, a vague recollection began to illumine his mind, at the same time that a confused analogy between what the dauphin was saying and a disagreeable circumstance of late occurrence entered his thought. "A fine question!" said he. "Certainly, everything has been ordered for her Royal Highness, and for her alone; and therefore, I repeat, she cannot fail to arrive very soon. But why do you look at me in that manner?" added he, in a decided tone, which to the dauphin seemed even threatening. "Are you amusing yourself in studying my features as you study the springs of your mechanical works?"

The dauphin had opened his mouth to speak, but became silent at this address.

"Very well," said the king, sharply; "it appears you have no more to say, eh? Are you satisfied now? Your dauphiness will arrive soon; all is arranged delightfully for her on the road; you are as rich as Crœsus with

your own private purse. And now, since your mind is at ease, be good enough to put my clock in order again."

The dauphin did not stir.

"Do you know," said the king, laughing, "I have a great mind to make you the chief clockmaker for the palace, with a good salary?"

The dauphin looked down, and, intimidated by the king's look, took up the wheel and the file which he had laid on the chair. The king in the mean time had quietly gained the door. "What the devil," said he, looking at him, "did he mean with his badly arranged service? Well, well! I have escaped another scene, for he is certainly dissatisfied about something."

In fact the dauphin, generally so patient, had stamped with his foot as the king turned away from him.

"He is beginning again," murmured the king, laughing; "decidedly, I have nothing for it but to fly." But as he opened the door he saw on the threshold the Duc de Choiseul, who bowed profoundly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COURT OF KING PÉTAUD.

THE king made a step backward at the sight of this new actor in the scene, who had come just in time to prevent his escape. "Ha!" thought he, "I had forgotten him; but he is welcome, and I will make him pay for what the others have made me suffer. Ha! you are there!" he cried. "I sent for you; did you know that?"

"Yes, Sire," replied the minister, coldly; "I was dressing to wait on your Majesty when the summons arrived."

"I wished to speak to you on serious matters," said the king, frowning, in order, if possible, to intimidate his minister. Unfortunately for the king, Monsieur de Choiseul was one of the men least likely to be daunted among all those in his dominions.

"And I also, if it please your Majesty," said he, bowing, "have serious matters to speak of." At the same time he exchanged a look with the dauphin, who was still half hidden by the clock.

The king stopped short. "Ha!" thought he, "now I am caught between two fires; there is no escape."

"You know, I presume," said the king, hastily, in order to have the first word, "that poor Vicomte Jean has had a narrow escape from assassination."

"That is to say, he has received a wound in his arm. I came to speak of that affair to your Majesty."

"I understand; you wished to prevent unpleasant *reports?*"

"I wished, Sire, to anticipate all remarks."

"Then you know the particulars, Monsieur?" inquired the king, in a significant manner.

"Perfectly."

"Ha!" said the king, "I was told so by one who was likely to be well informed."

The Duc de Choiseul seemed quite unmoved. The dauphin continued turning the screw in the clock, his head bent down; but he lost not a syllable of the conversation.

"I shall now tell you how the affair happened," said the king.

"Does your Majesty think that you have been well informed?" asked M. de Choiseul.

"Oh! as to that —"

"We are all attention, Sire."

"We?" repeated the king.

"Certainly, — Monseigneur the Dauphin and I."

"Monseigneur the Dauphin?" repeated the king, turning his eyes from the respectful Choiseul to the attentive Louis Auguste, "and how does this squabble concern his Royal Highness?"

"It concerns Monseigneur," said the duke, bowing to the young prince, "because Madame the Dauphiness was the cause of it."

"The dauphiness the cause?" said the king, starting.

"Certainly; if you are ignorant of that, Sire, your Majesty has been very badly informed."

"The dauphiness and Jean Dubarry!" said the king; "this is likely to be a curious tale! Come, explain this, Monsieur de Choiseul; conceal nothing, even though it were the dauphiness herself who pierced Dubarry's arm!"

"Sire, it was not the dauphiness," replied Choiseul,

still calm and unmoved, "it was one of the gentlemen of her escort."

"Ah!" said the king, again becoming grave, "an officer whom you know, is it not, Monsieur?"

"No, Sire, but an officer whom your Majesty ought to know, if you remember all who have served you well; an officer whose father's name was honored at Philipsbourg, at Fontenoi, at Mahon, — a Taverney Maison Rouge."

The dauphin seemed to draw a deeper breath, as if to inhale this name with the air of the hall, and preserve it in his memory.

"A Maison Rouge," said the king, — "certainly I know the name; and why did he attack Jean, whom I like so much? Perhaps because I like him! Such absurd jealousies, such discontents, are almost seditious!"

"Sire, will your Majesty deign to listen to me?" said M. de Choiseul.

The king saw there was no other way for him to escape from this troublesome business but by going into a passion, and he exclaimed, "I tell you, Monsieur, that I see in this the beginning of a conspiracy against my peace, an organized persecution of my family!"

"Ah, Sire," said Monsieur de Choiseul, "is it for defending the dauphiness, your Majesty's daughter-in-law, that these reproaches are cast on a brave young man?"

The dauphin raised his head and folded his arms. For my part," said he, "I cannot but feel grateful to the man who exposed his life for a princess who in a fortnight will be my wife."

"Exposed his life! Exposed his life!" stammered the king. "What about? Let me know that, — what about?"

"About the horses of Madame the Dauphiness," replied

the duke. "Vicomte Jean Dubarry, who was travelling very fast, took it upon himself to insist on having some of those horses which were appropriated to the use of her Royal Highness, — no doubt that he might get on still faster."

The king bit his lip and changed color; he saw now, as a threatening apparition, the analogy which had previously disquieted him. "It is not possible," he murmured, to gain time. "I know the whole affair; you have been misinformed, Duke."

"No, Sire, I have not been misinformed; what I have the honor to tell your Majesty is the simple truth. Vicomte Jean Dubarry offered an insult to the dauphiness by insisting on taking for his use horses appointed for her service. After having ill-treated the master of the post-house, he was going to take them by force, when the Chevalier Philippe de Taverney arrived, sent forward by her Royal Highness; and after he had several times summoned him in a friendly and conciliating manner — "

"Oh, oh!" growled the king.

"After he had several times summoned him in a friendly and conciliating manner. I repeat it, Sire — "

"Yes, and I guarantee it," said the dauphin.

"You also know that — you?" said the king with astonishment.

"Perfectly, Sire."

The minister bowed, delighted. "Will your Royal Highness deign to proceed?" said he. "His Majesty will doubtless have more confidence in the assertions of his august grandson than in mine."

"Yes, Sire," continued the dauphin, without testifying for the Duc de Choiseul's zeal in his cause all that gratitude which might have been expected, "yes, Sire, I know the circumstances, and I had come to tell your

Majesty that Vicomte Dubarry has not only insulted the dauphiness in interfering with the arrangements made for her journey, but he has also insulted me in opposing a gentleman of my regiment who was doing his duty."

The king shook his head. "We must inquire," said he; "we must inquire."

"I have already inquired, Sire," said the dauphin, gently, "and have no doubt in the matter; the viscount drew his sword on my officer."

"Did he draw first?" asked the king, happy to seize any chance of putting his adversary in fault.

The dauphin colored, and looked to the minister for assistance. "Sire," said the latter, "swords were crossed by two men, one of whom was insulting, the other defending, the dauphiness, — that is all."

"Yes, but which was the aggressor?" asked the king. "I know poor Jean; he is as gentle as a lamb."

"The aggressor, in my opinion, Sire," said the dauphin, with his usual mildness, "is he who is in the wrong."

"It is a delicate matter to decide," replied the king; "the aggressor he who is in the wrong? — in the wrong? But if the officer was insolent?"

"Insolent!" cried the Duc de Choiseul, "insolent toward a man who wanted to take by force horses placed for the use of the dauphiness? Is it possible, Sire?"

The dauphin turned pale, but said nothing. The king noticed the hostile attitude of both.

"I should say warm, perhaps, not insolent," said he.

"But your Majesty knows," said the minister, taking advantage of the king's having yielded a step, to make a step forward, "your Majesty knows that a zealous servant can never be in the wrong."

"Oh, perhaps! But how did you become acquainted

with this event, Monsieur?" said he, turning sharply to the dauphin, without ceasing, however, to observe the duke, who endeavored vainly to hide the embarrassment which this sudden question caused him.

"By a letter, Sire," replied the dauphin.

"A letter from whom?"

"A letter from a person concerned for Madame the Dauphiness, and who thinks it singular that any one should dare to affront her."

"Ha!" cried the king, "more mysteries, secret correspondences, plots! Every one is beginning again to plan annoyances for me, as in the time of the Marquise de Pompadour!"

"No, Sire," said the minister; "this affair is no plot, and can be settled very simply. It is the crime of treason in the second degree; let the guilty person be punished, and all will be settled."

At this word "punished," Louis XV. saw in fancy the countess furious, and Chon in a rage; he saw Peace flying from his dwelling, — Peace, which he had been seeking all his life, but had never been able to find, — and Intestine War, with crooked nails and eyes red and swollen with tears, entering in her stead.

"Punished!" he cried, "without my giving the parties a hearing; without knowing which side is in the right? You make a very extraordinary proposal to me, Duke. You wish to draw odium on me!"

"But, Sire, who will henceforward respect Madame the Dauphiness if a severe example is not made of the person who was the first to insult her?"

"Certainly, Sire," added the dauphin; "it would be a scandal."

"An example? a scandal?" cried the king. "*Mordieu!* if I make an example for every scandal that springs

up around me, I may pass my life in signing arrests for the Bastille! I have signed enough of them as it is, Heaven knows!"

"In this case it is necessary, Sire," said the duke.

"Sire, I entreat your Majesty," said the dauphin.

"What! do you not think him punished already, by the wound he has received?"

"No, Sire," said the duke; "for he might have wounded the Chevalier de Taverney."

"And in that case what would you have done?"

"I should have demanded his head."

"But no more than that was done in the case of M. de Montgomery for killing King Henry II.," said the king.

"He killed the king by accident, Sire; Vicomte Dubarry insulted the dauphiness intentionally."

"And you, Monsieur," said the king, turning to the dauphin, "do you wish to have Jean's head?"

"No, Sire; I am not in favor of the punishment of death, as your Majesty knows. I shall merely demand from you the viscount's banishment."

The king started up. "Banishment for a tavern quarrel?" he exclaimed. "Louis, you are severe, notwithstanding your philanthropical notions. It is true that before becoming philanthropist you were a mathematician, and —"

"Will your Majesty deign to proceed?"

"A mathematician would sacrifice the universe to his problem."

"Sire," said the dauphin, "I have no ill-will toward the Vicomte Dubarry personally."

"With whom, then, are you angry?"

"With the insulter of Madame the Dauphiness."

"What a model for husbands!" cried the king, ironically; "but I am not so easy of belief. I see very well

who is attacked under all this; I see to what people would lead me with their exaggerations!"

"Sire," said M. de Choiseul, "do not be misled. Nothing has been exaggerated; the public are indignant at the insolence which has been shown in this affair."

"The public? Ah! there is another monster with which you frighten yourself, or rather with which you would frighten me. Shall I listen to this public, which by the thousand mouths of libellists, pamphleteers, and ballad-mongers, tells me that I am robbed, ridiculed, betrayed on all hands? No, no; I let the public talk, and I laugh. Do as I do, *pardieu!* Close your ears, and when your great public is tired of bawling, it will stop. There you are again, making your discontented bow; and Louis is putting on a sulky face! Heavens! is it not singular that what is done for the lowest individual cannot be done for me? I cannot be allowed to live quietly in my own fashion! Everybody hates what I love, and loves what I hate! Am I in my senses, or am I mad? Am I the master, or am I not?"

The dauphin took up his file and returned to his work in the clock. The Duc de Choiseul bowed exactly as before.

"There now, — no answer! Answer something, will you? *Mordieu!* you will harass me to death with your hints and your reservations, your petty hatreds and your petty fears!"

"I do not hate M. Dubarry, Sire," said the dauphin, smiling.

"And I do not fear him, Sire," said the minister, haughtily.

"You are both very ill-natured," cried the king, pretending to be in a great passion, when he was in reality only out of temper. "You wish to make me the laughing-

stock of all Europe, — to give my cousin of Prussia something to make jests on; to make me realize the court of King Pétaud, which that rascal Voltaire has described. But I will not be what you wish; no, you shall not have that satisfaction. I know what concerns my own honor, and I shall attend to it in my own way."

"Sire," said the dauphin, with his immovable mildness, but at the same time with his unyielding perseverance, "this is not a matter which concerns your honor, it is the dignity of the dauphiness which has been attacked."

"Monseigneur is right, Sire," said the duke; "let but your Majesty speak the word, and no one will again dare to insult her."

"And who would insult her? No one intended to insult her. Jean is a stupid fellow, but he is not malignant."

"Well, then, Sire," continued the minister, "let it be placed to the account of stupidity, and let him ask pardon of the Chevalier de Taverney on that ground."

"I said before," cried the king, "that I have nothing to do in the affair. Let Jean ask pardon: he is at liberty to do so; or let him decline: he is at liberty to do that."

"The affair abandoned to itself will make a noise, Sire," said M. de Choiseul. "I have the honor to warn your Majesty."

"So much the better!" cried the king. "Let it make more and more noise, till I am deafened by it, so that I may no longer hear your foolish utterances."

"Then," replied the minister, with his imperturbable coolness, "I am authorized by your Majesty to say that Vicomte Dubarry did right?"

"Authorized by me? authorized by me? and in an affair of which I understand nothing! You mean, I see,

to drive me to extremities. Take care, Duke! and you, Louis, must be more considerate toward me! I shall leave you to think of what I have said, for I am tired out; I cannot bear this any longer. Good-by, gentlemen! I am going to see my daughters, and then I shall take refuge at Marly, where I may hope for some tranquillity, if you do not follow me."

At this moment, and as the king was going toward the door, it was opened, and an usher appeared.

"Sire," said he, "her Royal Highness the Princess Louise is awaiting your Majesty in the gallery to bid you farewell."

"To bid me farewell?" exclaimed the king, in alarm; "where is she going?"

"Her Highness says that she has had your Majesty's permission to leave the palace."

"Ha! another scene! This is my bigot daughter going to show off some of her follies. In truth, I am the most wretched of men!" And he left the apartment hurriedly.

"His Majesty has given us no answer," said the Duc de Choiseul. "What has your Royal Highness decided on?"

"Ah, there it strikes!" said the young prince, listening with either a real or a pretended joy to the clock which he had restored to action.

The minister frowned, and retired backward from the Hall of Clocks, leaving the dauphin alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MADAME LOUISE OF FRANCE.

THE king's eldest daughter awaited him in the great gallery of Lebrun, the same in which Louis XIV., in 1683, had received the Doge Imperiali and the four Genoese senators sent to implore pardon for the republic.

At the farther end of the gallery, opposite the door by which the king must enter, were three or four ladies-of-honor, who appeared to be in the greatest consternation. Louis arrived just at the moment when groups began to form in the vestibule; for the resolution which the princess had taken only that morning was now whispered on all sides through the palace.

The Princess Louise possessed a majestic figure and a truly regal style of beauty, yet a secret sadness had left its lines on her fair forehead. Her austere practice of every virtue had won from all the court respect for the great powers of the State, which for fifty years had retained homage in France only through fear and ambition. We must add that she was loved even by the people, at a time when the disaffection of the people toward their masters was becoming general.

She was loved because her virtue was not stern. She was not loudly talked of, but all knew that she had a gentle disposition. She manifested this every day by works of charity, while others were exhibiting their characters in scandalous behavior. Louis XV. feared this *daughter,* for the simple reason that he esteemed her.

There were even times when he was proud of her; and she was the only one of his children whom he spared in his sharp raillery or his silly familiarities. He called her Madame, while the Princesses Adélaïde, Victoire, and Sophie he named Loque, Chiffe, and Graille. Since the period when Marshal Saxe carried with him to the tomb the soul of the Turennes and the Condés, and with the Queen Maria Leczinska passed away the governing mind of a Maria Theresa, all had become mean and worthless around the throne of France. The Princess Louise, whose character was truly regal, and compared with those around her seemed even heroic, alone remained to adorn the crown, like a pearl of price amid false stones and tinsel. We should be wrong in concluding from this that Louis XV. loved his daughter. Louis, it is well known, loved no one but himself; we affirm only that he preferred her to his other children.

When he entered, he found the princess in the centre of the gallery, leaning on a table inlaid with crimson jasper and lapis lazuli. She was dressed entirely in black, and her beautiful hair, which was without powder, was covered by a double roll of lace. A deeper shade of sadness than usual rested on her brow. She looked at no one in the apartment, but from time to time her melancholy gaze wandered over the portraits of the kings of Europe which ornamented the gallery, at the head of whom were those of her ancestors, the kings of France.

The black dress which she wore was the usual travelling costume of princesses. It concealed large pockets, still worn as in the times of the housewife-queens; and the Princess Louise, imitating them in that also, had the numerous keys of her chests and wardrobes suspended at her waist by a gold chain.

The king's face assumed a very serious expression when

he saw how silent all in the gallery were, and how attentively they awaited the result of the interview between him and his daughter. The gallery was so long that the spectators at either end might see, but they could not hear what took place. They had a right to see; it was their duty not to hear.

The princess advanced a few steps to meet the king, and taking his hand, she kissed it respectfully.

"They tell me you are setting out on a journey, Madame," said he; "are you going into Picardy?"

"No, Sire," she replied.

"Then I presume," said he, in a louder voice, "that you are about to make a pilgrimage to Noirmoutiers?"

"No, Sire, I am going to retire to the convent of the Carmelites at St. Denis, of which you know I have the right to be abbess."

The king started; but he preserved his countenance unmoved, although in reality his heart was troubled. "Oh, no, my daughter!" he said, "you will not leave me; it is impossible for you to leave me!"

"My dear father, it is long since I decided on abandoning the world. Your Majesty permitted me to make that decision; do not now, I entreat you, my dear father, oppose my wishes."

"Yes, certainly, you wrung from me the permission of which you speak. I gave it, but still hoped that when the moment of departure came, your heart would fail you. You ought not to bury yourself in a cloister, — that is an antiquated custom. It is only grief or want of fortune which forces one to enter a convent. The daughter of the King of France is certainly not poor; and if she be unhappy, the world ought not to know it."

The king's thoughts and even his language seemed to become more elevated as he entered more and more into

the part he was called on to play, — that of a king and a father. This is, indeed, a part never played ill when pride and regret inspire the actor.

"Sire," replied the princess, perceiving her father's emotion, and fearful that it might affect her more deeply than she desired at that moment, "Sire, do not by your tenderness for me weaken my resolution. My grief is no vulgar grief, and therefore it has no relation to the customs of the present time."

"Your grief?" exclaimed the king, with a burst of feeling. "Have you then sorrows, my poor child?"

"Heavy, heavy sorrows, Sire!"

"Why did you not confide them to me, my child?"

"Because they are sorrows not to be assuaged by any mortal hand."

"Not by that of a king?"

"Ah, no, Sire!"

"Not by a father's hand?"

"No, Sire, no!"

"But you are religious, Louise; does not religion give you strength?"

"Not sufficient strength yet, Sire; therefore I retire to a cloister in order to obtain more. In silence God speaks to the heart of man; in solitude man communes with God."

"But you are making a sacrifice for which nothing can compensate. The throne of France casts a majestic shadow over the children of its kings; does not this grandeur satisfy you?"

"The shadow of the cell is better, Sire. It refreshes the weary spirit; it soothes the strong as well as the weak, the humble as well as the proud, the high as well as the low."

"Is it then some danger that you fear? In that case, Louise, the king is here to defend you."

"Sire, may God, in the first place, defend the king!"

"I repeat, Louise, that mistaken zeal leads you astray. It is good to pray, but not to pray always; and you, — so good, so pious, — how can you need to pray so much?"

"Oh, my father, never can I offer up prayers enough to avert the woes which threaten you! If God has given me a portion of goodness; if for twenty years my only effort has been to purify my soul, — I fear, alas! that I am yet far from having attained the goodness and the purity necessary to an expiatory victim."

The king started back and gazed at the princess with surprise. "Never have I heard you speak thus before, my dear child!" said he. "Your ascetic life is making your reason wander."

"Oh, Sire, do not speak thus of a devotion the truest that ever subject offered to a king, or daughter to a father, in a time of need! Sire, that throne, of which you but now so proudly spoke as lending a protecting shade to your children, — that throne is tottering! You perceive not the blows which are dealt at its foundations, but I know them. Silently a deep abyss is preparing which will engulf the monarchy! Sire, has any one ever told you the truth?"

The princess looked around to discover whether the attendants were far enough to be out of hearing of her words; then she resumed: "Well, Sire, I know the truth! Too often have I heard the groans which the wretched send forth when, as a Sister of Mercy, I visited the dark, narrow streets, the filthy lanes, the dismal garrets of the poor. In those streets, those lanes, those garrets, I have seen human beings dying of cold and hunger in winter, of heat and thirst in summer. You see not, Sire, what the country is, — you, who go only from Versailles to

rly, and from Marly to Versailles. But in the country

there is no grain, — I do not say to feed the people, but even to sow for a new harvest; for the land, cursed by some adverse power, has received, but has given nothing back. The people, wanting bread, are filled with discontent. The air is filled in the twilight and at night with voices telling them of weapons, of chains, of prisons, of tyranny; and at these voices they awake, cease to complain, and begin to threaten. The parliaments demand the right of remonstrance, — that is, the right to say to you openly what they whisper in private, 'King, you are ruining the kingdom; save it, or we will save it ourselves.' The soldiers with their idle swords furrow the land in which the philosophers have scattered the seeds of liberty. Men now see things which they formerly saw not. The writers know the evil that we do as soon as it is done, and they inform the people, who now bend their brows whenever they see their masters going by. Your Majesty's successor is soon to be married. When Anne of Austria's son was married, the city of Paris made presents to the new queen; now it is not only silent and offers nothing, but you have been obliged to use force to collect the taxes to pay the expense of bringing the daughter of Cæsar to the palace of the son of Saint Louis. The clergy had long ceased to pray to God; but seeing the lands given away, privileges exhausted, coffers empty, they have begun again to pray for what they call the happiness of the people. And then, Sire, must I tell you what you know so well, what you have seen with so much bitterness, although you have spoken of it to none? The kings your brothers, who formerly envied us, now turn away from us. Your four daughters, Sire, princesses of France, have not found husbands; and there are twenty princes in Germany, three in England, sixteen in the States of the North, without naming our relatives the Bourbons of

Spain and Naples, who forget us, or turn away from us like the others. Perhaps the Turk would have taken us had we not been daughters of his most Christian Majesty. Not for myself, my father, do I care for this, or complain of it. Mine is a happy state, since it leaves me free, since I am not necessary to any one of my family, and may retire from the world, in meditation and in poverty to pray to God to avert from your head and from my nephew's the awful storm I see gathering on the horizon of the future."

"My child, my daughter, it is your fears which make the future appear so dreadful!"

"Sire, Sire, remember that princess of antiquity, that royal prophetess! She foretold to her father and to her brothers war, destruction, conflagration; and her predictions were laughed at, they called her mad! Do not treat me as she was treated! Take care, O my father! Reflect, O my king!"

Louis XV. folded his arms, and his head sank on his bosom. "My daughter," said he, "you speak very severely. Are those woes which you denounce caused by me?"

"God forbid that I should think so! They are the fruit of the times in which we live. You are whirled on in the career of events as are we all. Only listen, Sire, to the applause in the theatre which follows any adverse allusion to royalty. See, in the evenings, what joyous crowds descend the narrow stairs of the galleries, while the grand marble staircase is deserted. Sire, both the people and the courtiers have made for themselves pleasures quite apart from our pleasures. They amuse themselves without us; or rather, when we appear in the midst of their pleasures, they become dull. Alas!" continued the princess, her eyes swimming with tears, "alas! poor

young men, affectionate young women, love, sing, forget, be happy! Here, when I went among you, I only disturbed your happiness. Yonder, in my cloister, I shall serve you. Here, you hid your glad smiles in my presence for fear of displeasing me. There, I shall pray, oh! I shall pray with all my soul, for my king, for my sisters, for my nephews, for the people of France, — for you all, whom I love with the energy of a heart which no earthly passion has exhausted."

"My daughter," said the king, after a melancholy silence, "I entreat you not to leave me, — not at this moment, at least; you will break my heart!"

The princess seized his hand, and, fixing her eyes full of love on his noble features, "No!" said she, "no, my father, — not another hour in this palace! No, it is time for me to pray. I feel in myself strength to redeem, by my tears, those pleasures for which you sigh, — you, who are yet young. You are the kindest of fathers, you are ever ready to pardon!"

"Stay with us, Louise! stay with us!" said the king, pressing her to his heart.

The princess shook her head. "My kingdom is not of this world!" said she, disengaging herself from her father's embrace. "Farewell, my father! I have told you to-day what for ten years has lain heavy on my heart. The burden became too great. Farewell! I am satisfied. See, I can smile, — I am now, at length, happy; I regret nothing!"

"Not even me, my daughter?"

"Ah, I should regret you were I never to see you again; but you will sometimes come to St. Denis? You will not quite forget your child?"

"Oh, never, never!"

'Do not, my dear father, allow yourself to be afflicted

Let it not appear that this separation is to be a lasting one. My sisters, I believe, know nothing of it yet; my women alone have been my confidants. For eight days I have been making all my preparations; and I wish that the report of my departure should be spread only when the great doors of St. Denis shall have closed on me. That last sound will prevent my hearing any other."

The king read in his daughter's eyes that her resolution was irrevocable, and he wished that she should go without disturbance. If she feared that sobs might shake her resolution, he feared them still more for his nerves. Besides, he wished to go to Marly that day, and too much grief at Versailles might have obliged him to put off his journey. He reflected also that when issuing from orgies discreditable both to a king and to a father, he should no more meet that grave, sad face, which seemed to reproach him for the careless, worthless life he led. "Be it then as you wish, my child," said he; "but at least receive before you go the blessing of a father whom you have always made perfectly happy."

"Give me your hand only, Sire, and let me kiss it. Bestow your precious blessing on me in thought."

To those who knew the decision of the princess it was a solemn spectacle to see her at every step she made advancing, yet in life, to the tombs of her ancestors, — those ancestors who from their golden frames seemed to thank her that she hastened to rejoin them.

At the door of the gallery the king bowed, and returned without uttering a word. The court, according to etiquette, followed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOQUE, CHIFFE, AND GRAILLE.

The king passed on to what was called the Cabinet s Equipages. It was there that he was accustomed, before going to hunt or to drive, to pass a few minutes in giving particular orders concerning the vehicles and attendants he should require during the rest of the day.

At the door of the gallery he bowed to the courtiers, and by a wave of his hand indicated that he wished to be alone. When they had left him he passed through the cabinet to a corridor which led to the apartments of the princesses. Having reached the door, before which hung a curtain, he stopped for a moment, shook his head, and muttered between his teeth, "There was but one of them good, and she is gone!"

This very flattering speech for those who remained was answered by a shrill chorus of voices; the curtain was raised, and the furious trio saluted their father with cries of "Thank you, father, thank you!"

"Ha, Loque!" said he, addressing the eldest of them, Madame Adélaïde, "you heard what I said, — so much the worse for you. Be angry or not, just as you like; I spoke only the truth."

"Yes," said Madame Victoire, "you tell us nothing new, Sire. We always knew that you preferred Louise to us."

"In faith, quite true, Chiffe."

"And why do you prefer Louise?" asked Madame Sophie, sharply.

"Because Louise never gave me any trouble," replied the king, with that good-humored frankness of which, when he was pleased, Louis XV. was so excellent an example.

"Oh, but she will give you trouble yet, rest assured!" replied Madame Sophie, with such a peculiar emphasis that it drew the attention of the king more particularly to her.

"And pray, what do you know about her, Graille?" said he. "Did Louise, before going away, make you her confidant? I should be rather surprised if she did, for she is not very fond of you."

"I can say most truly," answered the princess, "that I return her affection with interest."

"Oh, very well! Hate one another, detest one another as much as you choose; I am perfectly content. Only do not summon me to restore order in the kingdom of the Amazons. But I should like to know how poor Louise is to give me trouble."

"Poor Louise!" repeated Madame Victoire and Madame Adélaïde, each with her own grimace.

"You wish to know how she will give you trouble? Well, I will tell you," said Madame Sophie.

The king stretched himself in a large easy-chair, placed near the door, so that he could at any moment make his escape.

"Louise is retiring to a convent because she is slightly tormented by the demon which troubled the Abbess of Chelles, and she wishes to make some experiments."

"Come, come!" said the king, "no insinuations against the virtue of your sister. No one from without has said a word of that kind, though so many things are *said*; do not you begin — you."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh! I was not going to attack Louise's virtue," said Madame Sophie, very much hurt by the peculiar accent her father had given to the word "you," and by his marked repetition of it; "I only said she was going to make experiments."

"Well, and if she does make experiments in chemistry; if she does make firearms, and wheels for chairs; if she does play on the flute, the drum, or the harpsichord, or the violin, — what harm would there be in it?"

"The experiments to which I alluded were experiments in politics."

The king started.

"She is going to study philosophy and theology; she will continue the commentaries on the Bull *Unigenitus;* so that, what with her governmental theories, her metaphysical systems, and her theology, we must appear useless members of the family."

"And if these pursuits lead your sister to heaven, what harm can you see in them?" said the king, struck, however, with the agreement between what Madame Sophie was saying, and the political diatribe which Madame Louise had pronounced on her departure. "If you envy her happiness, you are very bad Christians."

"Ah! indeed, no!" said Madame Victoire; "she has my full permission to go, but I shall take care not to follow her."

"Nor I!" responded Madame Adélaïde.

"Nor I!" said Madame Sophie.

"Besides, she always detested us," said Madame Victoire.

"You?" the king asked.

"Yes, us, us," replied the two other sisters.

"Oh, then, you see," he said, "poor Louise has chosen to go to heaven that she may not meet any of her family again!"

This sally made the three sisters laugh, but rather constrainedly. Madame Adélaïde, the eldest, brought all her wit into play in order to deal her father a more weighty blow than he had given them.

"Ladies," said she, with the sneering tone which was peculiar to her when roused from that habitual indolence which had procured for her the name of Loque, "you have either not found out or you do not dare tell the king the real cause of Louise's departure!"

"Come, Loque, come! you have some wicked tale to tell, I see. Let us hear it!"

"Sire, I fear it may vex you."

"No, no; say you hope it will vex me, — that would be nearer the truth."

Madame Adélaïde bit her lips. "Then I shall tell you the truth, Sire."

"Good! that promises well. The truth! Cure yourself of that way of talking. Do I ever tell the truth? Well, you see I do very well without it, thank God!" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Speak, sister, speak," said the other two sisters, impatient to hear anything that might wound their father.

"Sweet little creatures!" growled the king, "see how they love their father!" But he consoled himself by thinking that he returned their love in kind.

"Well," continued Madame Adélaïde, "what Louise dreaded most, for she was very precise on the score of etiquette, was —"

"Was what?" exclaimed the king. "Come, finish, *since you* have gone so far!"

"It was, then, Sire, the intrusion of new faces at court."

"Do you say intrusion?" asked he, by no means pleased with this beginning, for he saw to what it tended. "Intrusion? Are there intruders, then, in my palace? Am I forced to receive persons against my will?"

By this adroit turn he hoped to change the course of the conversation. But Madame Adélaïde believed herself on the right scent, and she was too cunning and too malicious to lose it, when she had so good an end in view as the annoyance of her father.

"Perhaps I was not quite correct; perhaps I used the wrong word. Instead of 'intrusion' I should have said 'introduction.'"

"Oh, ah!" said the king, "that is an improvement, — the other word was a disagreeable one, I confess; I like 'introduction' better."

"And yet," continued the princess, "that is not the right word either."

"What is it then?"

"It is 'presentation.'"

"Yes," cried the other sisters, "yes, you have found the right word now."

The king bit his lip. "Oh! do you think so?" said he.

"Yes," replied Madame Adélaïde, "my sister was very much afraid of new presentations."

"Well?" said the king, feeling what must come, and thinking it best to have done with it as speedily as possible; "well? go on!"

"Well, Sire, she was consequently afraid of seeing the Comtesse Dubarry presented at court."

"Ha!" cried the king, with a burst of passion which he could not repress, "so you have been all this time getting this out! *Mordieu!* Madame Truth-teller, how you beat about the bush!"

"Sire," replied the princess, "if I have so long delayed in telling your Majesty this, it is because respect closed my lips, and I should not have opened them but by your own command."

"Yes, yes; you would never have opened them, I suppose, to yawn or to speak or to bite!"

"I am quite certain, however, Sire, that I have discovered the real motive which has made my sister retire into a convent."

"Well, you are wrong!"

"Oh, Sire!" said Madame Victoire and Madame Sophie together, nodding their heads, "oh, Sire! we are sure of it."

"Pshaw! You are all of a tale, I see. There is a conspiracy in my family. This is the reason the presentation cannot take place; this is the reason the princesses can never be seen when persons wish to visit them, — that they give no answers to petitions, or requests for an audience."

"What petitions? What requests for an audience?" asked Madame Adélaïde.

"Oh! you know," replied Madame Sophie, — "the petitions of Mademoiselle Jeanne Vaubernier."

"No," added the Princess Victoire, "the requests for an audience of Mademoiselle Lange."

The king started up, furious with passion. His eye, generally calm and mild, now flashed in a manner rather alarming for the three sisters; and as none of this royal trio of heroines was courageous enough to bear the paternal wrath, they bent their heads before the storm.

"And now," cried he, "was I wrong when I said the best had left me?"

"Sire," said the Princess Adélaïde, "you treat us very ill, — worse than you treat your dogs!"

"And justly too. My dogs, when I go near them, receive me kindly, caress me, — they are real friends. So adieu, ladies! I shall go to Charlotte, Bellefille, and Gredinet. Poor animals! Yes, I love them! And I love them more particularly because they do not bark out the truth."

The king left the apartment in a rage; but he had not taken three steps in the ante-room, when he heard his daughters singing in chorus the first verse of a ballad ridiculing the Comtesse Dubarry, which was then sung through the streets of Paris.

He was about to return, — and perhaps the princesses would not have fared well had he done so, — but he restrained himself, and went on, calling loudly, that he might not hear them, "Halloa! the captain of the greyhounds! the captain of the greyhounds!"

The officer who bore this singular title hurried forward.

"Let the dogs be loosed!"

"Oh, Sire!" cried the officer, placing himself in the king's way, "do not advance another step!"

"What now? what now?" said the king, stopping before a door, from under which was heard the snuffing of dogs, aware that their master was near.

"Sire," said the officer, "pardon me, but I cannot permit your Majesty to enter here."

"Oh! I understand; the kennel is out of order. Well, then, let Gredinet be brought out."

"Sire," continued the officer, with alarm depicted on his face, "Gredinet has neither eaten nor drunk for two days, and it is feared he is mad."

"Oh," cried the king, "I am really the most wretched of men! Gredinet mad! This alone was wanting to complete my misery!"

The officer of the greyhounds thought it his duty to

shed a tear, to complete the scene. The king turned on his heel, and retired to his private cabinet, where his valet was waiting. He, seeing the king's face so disturbed, hid himself in the recess of a window; and the king, looking upon him rather as a piece of furniture than as a man, strode up and down his room talking to himself.

"Yes, I see it, I see it plainly," said he. "The Duc de Choiseul laughs at me; the dauphin looks upon himself as already half master, and thinks he will be wholly so when he has his little Austrian beside him on the throne. Louise loves me, but so sternly that she preaches me a sermon and leaves me. My three other daughters sing songs in which I am ridiculed under the name of Blaise. My grandson, the Comte de Provence, translates Lucretius; and his brother, the Comte d'Artois, is a dissipated scapegrace. My dogs go mad, and would bite me. Decidedly, there is only the poor countess who loves me. To the devil, then, with those who would annoy her!"

Then the king seated himself, in a desperate mood, at that table on which Louis XIV. wrote his proudest letters and signed his last treaties. "I know now," continued he, "why every one wishes to hasten the arrival of the dauphiness. They think that when she shows herself I shall become her slave and be governed by her family. Faith! I shall see her soon enough, that dear daughter-in-law of mine, particularly if her arrival is to be the signal for new troubles. Let me be quiet as long as I can, and to that end the longer she is delayed on the road the better. She was to have passed through Rheims and Noyon without stopping, and to come immediately to Compiègne. I shall insist on the first arrangement. Three days at Rheims and one — no, faith, two! — bah! *three* days at Noyon! That would be six days I should gain, — yes, six good days!"

He took a pen, and wrote an order to the Comte de Stainville to stop three days at Rheims and three days at Noyon. Then summoning a courier, "Don't draw bridle," said he, "until you have delivered this according to its address." Then with the same pen he wrote:

DEAR COUNTESS, — To-day we install Zamore in his government. I am just setting out for Marly. This evening, at Luciennes, I shall tell you all I now think.

FRANCE.

"Here, Lebel," said he to the valet, "take this letter to the countess, and keep on good terms with her, I advise you."

The valet bowed and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COMTESSE DE BÉARN.

THE principal object of all the fury of the court, and their stumbling-block on this dreaded occasion, the Comtesse de Béarn, was, as Chon said, travelling rapidly to Paris. Her journey thither was the result of one of those bright ideas which sometimes came to Vicomte Jean's assistance in his times of trouble. Not being able to find among the ladies of the court one who would present the Comtesse Dubarry, and since she could not be presented without a lady to introduce her, he cast his eye on the provinces. He examined country-seats, searched carefully in the towns, and at last found what he wanted on the banks of the Meuse, in a house of antique appearance, but well preserved. Now, what he wanted was an old lady fond of law, and having a lawsuit on hand. The old lady with the lawsuit was the Comtesse de Béarn.

The lawsuit was an affair which involved the entire fortune of the Comtesse de Béarn, and was to be heard before Monsieur de Maupeou, who had lately taken up the cause of the Comtesse Dubarry, having discovered — what had remained hidden until then — that he was related to her, and who now called her his cousin. Looking forward to the appointment of chancellor through her interest, he showed the king's favorite all the warmth of a friendship arising on such a substantial basis. This friend-

ship and this interest had procured for him from the king the office of vice-chancellor, and from the world in general the title of "the vice."

The Comtesse de Béarn was a thin, angular, agile little woman, always on the alert, always rolling her eyes under her gray eyebrows like those of a frightened cat. She still wore the dress which had been fashionable in her youth; and as the capricious goddess of fashion has sensible fits now and then, it so happened that the costume of the young girl of 1740 was precisely that of the old woman of 1770.

An abundance of lace, a pointed mantle, an enormous head-dress, an immense bag, and a neck-kerchief of flowered silk, — such was the costume in which Chon, the well-beloved sister and confidant of the Comtesse Dubarry, found the Comtesse de Béarn arrayed when she presented herself before her as Mademoiselle Flageot, the daughter of the lawyer in Paris who had the management of her suit. The old countess wore the costume of her early days as much from taste as from economy. She was not one of those persons who blush for their poverty, because her poverty had not been caused by her own fault. She regretted, indeed, not being rich, for her son's sake, to whom she would have wished to leave a fortune worthy of his name. The young man was thoroughly country bred, timid to a fault, caring much more for what belonged to the substantial things of life than for the honors of renown.

The countess's sole consolation consisted in calling the lands which were contested with the Saluces family "my estate;" but as she was a woman of sense, she was well aware that if she wanted to borrow money on that estate, not a usurer in France — and there were some bold enough in running risks at that period — would lend it

her; not an attorney — and there were some not very scrupulous then, as there have been at all times — would procure her the smallest sum on such a security.

Forced then to live on the annual rents of those lands that were not disputed, the Comtesse de Béarn, having an income of only one thousand crowns a year, kept very far from court; for there she must have spent twelve livres a day in the hire of a carriage to take her to her lawyer's and to the judge's. She was still more determined in keeping aloof, since she had despaired of her cause being heard for four or five years at least. Lawsuits, even in the present day, are in truth tedious affairs; but in these days a person who begins a lawsuit has some hope of seeing it to an end, though he may not live to the age of Methuselah, whereas formerly a suit extended through two or three generations, and was like those fabulous plants of the Arabian tales which blossomed only at the end of two or three centuries.

The Comtesse de Béarn, therefore, did not wish to lose the remains of her patrimony in seeking to recover the ten twelfths of it which were disputed. She was what is called "a woman of the old school," — that is to say, sagacious, prudent, firm, avaricious. She could certainly have managed her suit much better herself than any advocate, lawyer, or attorney; but she was called Béarn, and that name prevented her doing many things which economy might have prompted. Like the divine Achilles in his tent, suffering a thousand deaths when he heard the trumpet, although feigning to be deaf to it, she in her retirement was devoured by regret and anguish. She passed her days in deciphering old parchments, her spectacles on her nose; and at night, on her pillow, she pleaded with such eloquence the cause of the estate claimed by the Saluces that she was always successful, —

a termination of the affair which she could but wish might be reached by her advocate.

It may readily be imagined that in such a temper of mind, the arrival of Chon, in the character of Mademoiselle Flageot, was very agreeable to Madame de Béarn.

The young count was with his regiment.

We always believe what we wish to believe; so Madame de Béarn was very easily caught by the young lady's tale.

There was, however, a shadow of suspicion in the countess's mind. She had known Master Flageot twenty years, and had visited him two hundred times in his narrow, dark street; but she had never seen a child playing on the square bit of carpet which looked so small on the floor of his large office; and had there been children there, they would surely have found their way into it to get a toy or a cake from the clients.

But what was the use of thinking about the lawyer and his office and his carpet? What was the use of trying to remember anything about it? Flageot's daughter was Flageot's daughter, and there she was! Moreover, she was married, and — what banished the last shadow of suspicion — she had not come on purpose to Verdun; she was going to join her husband at Strasburg.

Perhaps the countess ought to have asked Mademoiselle Flageot for a letter from her father to assure herself of her identity; but if a father could not send his own child without a letter, to whom could he intrust a confidential mission? Then, once again, why entertain these fears? To what end these suspicions? Why should any one travel sixty leagues to tell her a deceitful story?

If she had been rich, — a banker's or a financier's wife, — taking with her carriages, plate, and diamonds, she might have thought it was a plot contrived by robbers.

But she laughed to herself when she thought what a disappointment any robbers would experience who should be so ill advised as to attack her.

So Chon having disappeared with her plain dress and her shabby little one-horse chaise, which she had taken at the last post, leaving her carriage behind her, the countess, convinced that the time had come for her to make a sacrifice, got into her old coach, and urged on the postilions so well that she passed through Lachaussée an hour before the dauphiness, and reached the gate of St. Denis five or six hours after Chon herself.

As she had little luggage, and as she was eager to receive information from her lawyer, she ordered her coach to drive to the Rue du Petit-Lion, and stop before Maître Flageot's door. The vehicle, we may be assured, did not stop there without attracting a great number of curious spectators, — and the Parisians are all curious, — who stared at the venerable machine which seemed to have issued from the coach-house of Henry IV., so antique was it in its solidity, its monumental form, and its scalloped leather curtains, which ran with a disagreeable creaking on a copper rod covered with verdigris.

The Rue du Petit-Lion was not wide, and the countess's equipage filled it up very majestically. Having alighted and paid the postilions, she ordered them to take it to the inn where she usually stopped, — Le Coq Chantant, in the Rue Saint-Germain des Près. She ascended Monsieur Flageot's dark stairs, holding by the greasy cord which served instead of a hand-rail. The air of the interior was cool, and it refreshed the old lady, who was tired by her long and rapid journey. When Marguerite, his servant, announced the Comtesse de Béarn, Maître Flageot pulled up his stockings, which he had allowed to fall nearly to *his ankles, on* account of the heat, with one hand, fixed

on his wig with the other, then hastily threw on a dimity dressing-gown, and so adorned advanced, smiling, to the door. In this smile, however, there was such an expression of surprise that the countess could not help saying, "Well, well, my dear Monsieur, it is I!"

"Yes, indeed," replied he; "I see plainly enough, Madame, that it is you!"

Then modestly wrapping his dressing-gown round him, he led the countess to a large leathern arm-chair in the lightest corner of the apartment, carefully putting aside the papers which covered his desk, for he knew the old lady to be curious in the extreme. "And now, Madame," he said, gallantly, "permit me to express my pleasure at this agreeable surprise!"

The countess had leaned back in her chair and raised her feet from the floor to allow Marguerite to slip between it and her brocaded satin shoes a leather cushion; but at this phrase she started up hastily. "What!" she exclaimed, drawing her spectacles from their case and putting them on, so that she might see his face the better, — "surprise?"

"Most assuredly! I thought you at your estates, Madame," replied the lawyer, adroitly flattering the old lady by bestowing this title on her three acres of kitchen-garden.

"Well, I was there; but on the first intimation from you I came away."

"Intimation from me?" said the astonished advocate.

"Yes, at your first word, or counsel, or advice, or whatever you please to call it."

Flageot's eyes looked as large as the countess's glasses.

"I have been very expeditious," continued she, "and I hope you are satisfied."

"I am delighted to see you, Madame, as I always am;

but allow me to say that I do not see how I have been the cause of your visit."

"Not the cause? Most certainly you have been the only cause of it!"

"I?"

"Yes, you, undoubtedly. Well, have you no news to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, Madame. It is said the king is meditating some great stroke of policy with regard to the parliament. But may I offer you some refreshment?"

"But what have I to do with the king and his strokes of policy?"

"About what, then, did you inquire, Madame?"

"About my suit, of course. It is in reference to my suit that I ask you whether there is anything new."

"Oh! as to that," said Flageot, shaking his head sorrowfully, "nothing, absolutely nothing!"

"That is to say, nothing —"

"No — nothing, Madame."

"Nothing since your daughter spoke to me about it; but as that was only the day before yesterday, I can readily understand that there may not be much new since then."

"My daughter, Madame?"

"Yes."

"Did you say my daughter?"

"Yes, your daughter, whom you sent to me."

"Pardon me, Madame, but it is quite impossible that I could send my daughter to you."

"Impossible?"

"Yes, for a very simple reason, — I have no daughter."

"Are you sure?" asked the countess.

"Madame," replied Flageot, "I have the honor to be a bachelor."

"Come, come!" said the countess, as if she supposed him jesting.

M. Flageot became uneasy; he called Marguerite to bring in some refreshment, but, more particularly, that she might watch the countess. "Poor woman!" said he to himself, "her head is turned."

"What!" said she, returning to the charge, "you have not a daughter?"

"No, Madame."

"A daughter married at Strasburg?"

"No, Madame, no; a thousand times no!"

"And you did not send that daughter," pursued the countess, "on her way thither, to tell me that my suit was placed on the docket?"

"Nothing of the kind, Madame."

The countess started from her chair and clasped her hands.

"Drink a little of something, Madame; it will do you good," said M. Flageot; and at the same time he made a sign to Marguerite to bring a tray, on which were two glasses of beer. But the old lady was not thinking of her thirst, and she pushed away the tray so rudely that Dame Marguerite, who appeared to be a privileged sort of person, was affronted.

"But let us understand each other," said the countess, eying Maître Flageot over her spectacles; "explain all this, if you please."

"Certainly, Madame. Marguerite, you need not go; the countess will perhaps drink something presently. Let us explain."

"Yes, let us explain; for, upon my honor, my dear Monsieur, you are quite incomprehensible to-day. I begin to think the hot weather has turned your brain."

"Do not be angry, Madame," said Flageot, manœuvring

with the hind-feet of his chair, so that he got by degrees farther from the countess; "do not get angry, and let us talk over the matter quietly."

"Yes, yes, certainly. You say you have not a daughter?"

"No, Madame; and I regret it deeply, since, as it appears, that would be agreeable to you, although —"

"Although what?" repeated the countess.

"Although, for my own part, I should prefer a son. Boys succeed better in the world, or rather, don't turn out so ill, as girls in the present day."

The countess looked more and more alarmed. "What!" said she, "have you not summoned me to Paris by a sister, a niece, a cousin, — by some person, in short?"

"I never thought of such a thing, Madame, knowing how expensive it is staying in Paris."

"But my suit?"

"I should always have taken care to let you know in time, before the pleading came on."

"Before it came on?"

"Yes."

"Has it not come on, then?"

"Not that I am aware, Madame."

"It has not been called?"

"No."

"And it is not likely to come on soon?"

"Oh no, Madame, certainly not!"

"Then," cried the old lady, rising, "I have been tricked! I have been most basely deceived!"

Flageot pushed back his wig, muttering, "I fear it, indeed, Madame."

"Maître Flageot!" cried the countess.

The lawyer started on his seat, and made a sign to Marguerite to keep near, in order to defend him.

"Maître Flageot," continued the countess, "I will not submit to such an indignity as this; I will address the minister of police, to discover the impudent creature who has thus insulted me!"

"Oh!" said Flageot, "it is a very doubtful affair."

"And when she is found," continued the countess, almost speechless with anger, "I shall bring an action against her."

"Another lawsuit!" said the lawyer, sorrowfully.

These words made the poor lady fall from the height of her passion, and a heavy fall it was. "Alas!" said she, "I came here so happy."

"But what did that woman say to you, Madame?"

"First, that she was sent by you."

"Shocking intriguer!"

"That you desired her to say that the trial was coming on, — was very near, — that I could scarcely be in time with all the speed I could make."

"Alas! Madame," repeated Flageot, in his turn, "the trial is very far from coming on."

"We are forgotten, are we not?"

"Forgotten! — sunk, buried, Madame; and unless a miracle were to happen, — and you know miracles are very rare nowadays —"

"Oh, yes!" murmured the countess, with a sigh.

M. Flageot replied by another sigh, a faithful echo of the countess's.

"Well, Monsieur, one thing is certain," added she.

"What is it, Madame?"

"I shall not survive this."

"Oh, don't say so! you would be quite wrong."

"Oh, Heaven! oh, Heaven!" exclaimed the poor countess, "my strength is completely exhausted."

"Courage, Madame, courage!" said Flageot.

"But have you no advice to give me?"

"Oh, yes! My advice is to return to your estates, and after this never believe anybody who does not bring you a letter from me."

"I must return indeed."

"It will be the wisest plan."

"Well, Monsieur," said the countess, with a groan, "believe me, we shall never meet again, — at least, not in this world."

"What an infamous affair!"

"I must have some very cruel enemies."

"It has been a trick of the Saluces, I would swear!"

"It is a very mean trick in any case."

"A mean, sorry trick indeed!"

"Justice! justice!" cried the countess; "my dear Monsieur, it is the cave of Cacus!"

"And why is it?" he replied. "Because justice is no longer itself; because the parliament is opposed; because Monsieur de Maupeou must be chancellor, forsooth! instead of remaining what he ought to be, president."

"M. Flageot, I think I could drink something now."

"Marguerite!" cried the lawyer, for she had left the room, seeing the peaceable turn affairs were taking. She now entered with the tray and the two glasses which she had carried away. The countess drank her glass of beer very slowly, after having touched the lawyer's glass with hers; then, sadly uttering farewell phrases, she went into the ente-room, on her way to the street. The lawyer followed her, his wig in his hand. She was in the lobby, and was reaching out her hand for the cord to aid her in her descent, when a hand was laid on hers, and a head gave her a thump on the chest. The head and the hand were those of a clerk, who was mounting the stairs four *steps* at a time.

The old lady, muttering and grumbling, readjusted her skirts and continued on her way, while the clerk, having reached the lobby, pushed open the lawyer's door, and with the open and joyous voice for which the clerks of the parliament were noted, cried out, "Here, Maître Flageot! here! it is about the Béarn business;" and he held out a paper.

To rush up the stairs on hearing that name, push by the clerk, throw herself on Flageot, snatch the paper from him, shut herself up with him in his office,—all this was affected by the countess before the clerk had recovered from two boxes on the ear which Marguerite bestowed, or seemed to bestow, on him, in return for two kisses.

"Well!" cried the old lady, "what is it? Maître Flageot, what is it?"

"Faith, I can't tell, Madame; but if you will give me back the paper, I will let you know."

"True, true, my good Maître Flageot! Read it; read it!"

He looked at the signature. "It is from Guildou, our attorney," said he.

"Ah! *mon Dieu!*"

"He desires me," continued Flageot, with increasing stupefaction, "he desires me to be ready to plead on Tuesday, for your affair is to come on!"

"To come on?" cried the countess. "Take care, Maître Flageot, take care! No more tricks! I should never recover from another."

"Madame," replied Flageot, overwhelmed by the intelligence, "if there be any trick, any jest in this, Guildou is the author of it; and it is certainly the first time in his life that he has jested."

"But are you certain the letter is from him?"

"It is signed 'Guildou,'—see!"

"I see it is. To be called this morning and pleaded on

Tuesday. Well, then, you see, my dear Monsieur, the lady who came to me was not a cheat."

"It appears not."

"Then since she was not sent by you — But are you sure she was not?"

"*Pardieu!* am I sure of it?"

"By whom was she sent, then?"

"Yes, by whom?"

"For she must have been sent by some one."

"It is a complete riddle to me."

"And to me also. Let me read the paper again. Yes, my dear Maître Flageot, the pleading is to come on; it is written so, — and before President Maupeou."

"The devil! Is that there?"

"Yes, certainly."

"That is vexatious."

"How so?"

"Because M. Maupeou is a great friend of your opponents."

"You know that?"

"He is always with them."

"Ha! I am truly unfortunate! Now we are more embarrassed than ever!"

"But, for all that," said the lawyer, "you must wait on him."

"He will receive me very badly!"

"That is probable."

"Oh, Maître Flageot, what do you tell me?"

"The truth, Madame."

"What! you not only lose courage yourself, but you try to deprive me of mine."

"With the Chancellor Maupeou you must not hope for anything favorable."

"You so timid! you a Cicero!"

"Cicero would have lost the cause of Ligarius had he pleaded before Verres instead of Cæsar," replied Maître Flageot, finding nothing more humble to say in return for the high compliment of his client.

"Then you advise me not to wait on him?"

"Heaven forbid, Madame, I should advise anything so irregular. But I pity you sincerely for having to undergo such an interview."

"You really speak like a soldier who means to desert his post. One would think you feared to undertake the business."

"Madame," replied the lawyer, "I have lost causes which seemed much more likely to be gained by me than this of yours does."

The countess sighed; but summoning all her energy, she said, with a kind of dignity which contrasted with the comical character of the interview, "I shall carry the matter through; it shall not be said that, having right on my side, I gave way before a cabal. I shall lose my cause, but I shall at least act as a woman of rank and character, — of whom there are few at court in the present day. You will accompany me, will you not, M. Flageot, in my visit to the vice-chancellor?"

"Madame," replied the lawyer, also calling to his aid all his dignity, "we opposition members of the parliament of Paris have sworn to have no intercourse beyond necessary audiences with those who failed to support the parliament in the affair of Monsieur d'Aiguillon. Union is strength; and as the vice-chancellor tacked about perpetually in that business, we have determined to keep aloof until he shows his real colors."

"My suit is doomed, I see," sighed the countess; "the lawyers quarrel with the judges, the judges with the clients. No matter; I shall persevere."

"God help you, Madame!" said Flageot, flinging his dressing-gown over his left arm as a Roman senator might have flung his toga.

"This is but a poor sort of an advocate," murmured the countess to herself; "I am afraid I shall have less chance with him before the parliament than I had at home on my pillow." Then aloud, with a smile, under which she strove to hide her uneasiness, "Adieu, Maître Flageot, adieu; study the case thoroughly, I entreat you, — we know not how things may turn out."

"Oh, Madame!" said Maître Flageot, "do not fear as to the pleading; I shall do you justice, — I shall make some terrible allusions."

"Allusions to what, Monsieur?"

"To the corruption of Jerusalem, Madame, which I shall compare to the accursed cities, and on which I shall invoke fire from heaven; you understand, Madame; and no one will fail to see that by Jerusalem I mean Versailles."

"M. Flageot," exclaimed the old lady, "do not compromise yourself, — or rather, do not compromise my cause."

"Oh, Madame, with Monsieur de Maupeou for judge, your cause is lost. But then, let the world hear of us; since we cannot obtain justice, let us at least strike terror to the wicked."

"Monsieur Flageot — "

"Madame, let us be philosophic; let us thunder — "

"The devil take you, with your thunder!" muttered the countess. "Fool of a lawyer, you are thinking only of making a figure with your fag-ends of philosophy. Come, I will go to the vice-chancellor; he at least is no philosopher. I may do better with him than with you, after all."

And the old countess left M. Flageot and the Rue du Petit-Lion, having passed in two days through all the stages of hope and of disappointment.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VICE.

The old countess trembled in every limb as she proceeded toward Monsieur de Maupeou's residence. However, one thought had quieted her a little on the road, — it was so late that in all probability she would not be admitted, and she would merely have to tell the porter when she should come again.

In fact, it was about seven in the evening; and although it was still light, the habit of dining at four, which the nobility had adopted, had caused all business to be suspended from that hour until the next day. Although Madame de Béarn anxiously longed to see the vice-chancellor, she was nevertheless consoled by the thought that she should not see him. This is one of the many paradoxes in the human mind which we can always understand, but never explain.

The countess presented herself, therefore, quite certain that the porter would refuse her admittance, and had even prepared a crown to offer the Cerberus to induce him to put her name on the list of those who requested an audience. On reaching the house she found an usher talking to the porter, as if giving him an order. She waited discreetly, that she might not interrupt them; but on perceiving her in her hackney-coach, the usher withdrew. The porter approached and asked her name.

"Oh! I know," said she, "that it is not probable I shall have the honor of seeing his Excellency."

"No matter, Madame," replied the porter; "have the goodness to tell me your name."

"The Comtesse de Béarn."

"Monseigneur is at home," he replied.

"What did you say?" asked the countess, with the greatest astonishment.

"I say that Monseigneur is at home," he repeated.

"But of course he will not receive visitors?"

"He will receive Madame la Comtesse."

Madame de Béarn got out of the coach, hardly knowing whether she was asleep or awake. The porter pulled a cord; a bell rang twice. The usher appeared at the top of the steps, and the porter made a sign to the countess to enter.

"You wish to speak to Monseigneur, Madame?" asked the usher.

"I wished for that honor, but I scarcely hoped to obtain it."

"Have the goodness to follow me, Madame la Comtesse."

"And people speak so ill of this chancellor," said the countess to herself, as she followed the usher; "yet he has certainly one good quality, — that of accessibility at all hours. Strange, in a vice-chancellor!" Still, she shuddered at the idea that she might find the chancellor severer and more ungracious for the very reason that he was assiduous in the performance of his duties.

M. de Maupeou, buried under a great wig, and dressed in a suit of black velvet, was at work in his cabinet, with the doors open. The countess on entering cast a rapid glance around. She saw with surprise that he was alone, that the mirrors reflected no other face than her own and that of the meagre, yellow, busy vice-chancellor.

The usher announced, "Madame the Comtesse de

Béarn." The vice-chancellor rose up stiffly, as if he had no joints, and, by the same movement, leaned his back against the mantelpiece.

The countess made the three reverences required by etiquette. The brief complimentary speech which followed the reverences was rather embarrassed. She did not expect the honor; she did not think that a minister who had so much to do would deprive himself of the hours necessary for recreation, etc.

The vice-chancellor replied that time was as precious to his Majesty's subjects as to his Majesty's ministers; that, nevertheless, he admitted there were distinctions to be made as to the importance of the affairs brought before him; consequently, he always gave the greater part of his time to those whose business was most urgent.

More reverences on the part of the countess, then an embarrassed silence; for compliments were ended, and her request must now be made. The vice-chancellor waited, stroking his chin.

"Monseigneur," said the countess, "I have presented myself before you, to explain to you an affair on which my whole fortune depends."

M. de Maupeou bowed, as if to intimate that she should go on.

"Monseigneur," she continued, "you must know that all my property, or rather my son's, is at stake in a suit now pending between us and the family of the Saluces."

The vice-chancellor continued to stroke his chin.

"But your equity is so well known to me, Monseigneur, that although I am aware of your interest in — indeed I may say your friendship for — the adverse party, I have not hesitated an instant in coming to entreat your Excellency to hear me."

M. de Maupeou could not help smiling on hearing him-

self praised for his equity, — a quality for which he was about as famous as Dubois was for the apostolical virtues on which he had been complimented fifty years before. "You are right, Madame," said he, "in saying that I am a friend of your opponents; but you are also right in thinking that, when I accepted the seals, I laid aside all friendship. I shall reply to you, then, without any bias, as becomes the supreme head of justice."

"Heaven bless you, Monseigneur!" cried the old countess.

"I shall examine your affair as a jurist only," continued the chancellor.

"I thank your Excellency; your skill in these matters is well known."

"Your cause comes on soon, I think?"

"Next week, Monseigneur!"

"In the mean time, what are your wishes respecting it?"

"That your Excellency would kindly look into the documents."

"I have already done so."

"Well," asked the old countess, trembling, "and what do you think of it, Monseigneur?"

"Of your suit?"

"Yes."

"I think that there is not a doubt on the subject."

"Not a doubt of my gaining?"

"No, — of your losing."

"Then you think, Monseigneur, I shall lose?"

"Undoubtedly. I shall therefore give you a piece of advice."

"What is it?" asked the countess, with a lingering hope.

"If you have any payments to make, the cause being tried, and sentence pronounced, have your funds ready."

"Oh, Monseigneur, we are ruined, then!"

"Surely you know, Madame, that justice never takes into account considerations of that kind."

"But, Monsigneur, by the side of justice there is mercy."

"It is precisely for that reason, Madame la Comtesse, that justice is blind."

"But your Excellency will not refuse me your advice?"

"Certainly not; ask it, Madame. On what point do you wish for it?"

"Is there no means of entering into an arrangement by which the judgment might not be so severe?"

"Do you know any of your judges?"

"Not one of them, Monseigneur."

"That is unfortunate. Messieurs de Saluces, your opponents, are connected with three fourths of the parliament."

The countess shuddered.

"But observe," continued the vice-chancellor, "that that counts for nothing; for a judge does not permit himself to be influenced by private feelings." This was about as true as that he possessed the virtue of equity, or Dubois the apostolic virtues. The countess nearly fainted.

"But, after all," continued the vice-chancellor, "the judge, having done all that integrity demands, of course leans more to a friend than to a person concerning whom he is indifferent. That is only just, when it is just; and as it is just that you should lose your cause, they may make the consequences very unpleasant to you."

"But what your Excellency does me the honor to tell me is frightful!"

"As far as I am concerned, I shall refrain from saying anything that might have an influence on the minds of

others; but as I am not a judge myself, I may speak to you of the state of affairs."

"Alas! Monseigneur, there is one thing quite clear to me."

The vice-chancellor fixed on her his little gray eyes.

"It is that the adverse party, living in Paris, have become connected with the judges, and thus are all-powerful."

"Because, in the first place, they have justice on their side."

"How painful it is, Monseigneur, to hear such words from the lips of a man infallible as you are!"

"I say this to you because it is the truth; and yet," continued M. de Maupeou, with an affected frankness, "I should like, upon my word, to serve you."

The countess started; she thought that she saw some obscure meaning, if not in the vice-chancellor's words, at least in his thoughts, which, if she could but understand it, was favorable to her.

"Besides," he proceeded, "the name you bear is one of the noblest in France, and that is in itself a powerful recommendation to me."

"Ah, Monseigneur, it will not prevent me from losing my suit."

"As to that, I have no power either one way or the other."

"Oh, Monseigneur, Monseigneur!" cried the countess, shaking her head, "how things go in this world now!"

"You seem to imply, Madame, that in old times they went better."

"Alas, Monseigneur, I cannot but think so! I recall with pleasure the time when you were merely a king's advocate in the parliament, and when you made those beautiful speeches which I, then a young woman, went to

listen to, and which I applauded with enthusiasm. What fire! what eloquence! what virtue! Ah, Monseigneur, in those times there were no plots, no cabals, no favorites; in those times I should have gained my suit!"

"Yet we had Madame de Phalaris then, who tried to reign occasionally, when the regent shut his eyes; and we had, too, La Souris, who went about picking up what crumbs she could find."

"Oh, Monseigneur, Madame de Phalaris was really a lady of rank, and La Souris was such a good-natured girl!"

"Yes; so nothing was refused them."

"Or, rather, they could refuse no one."

"Come, Madame," said the vice-chancellor, laughing in a manner that astonished the old lady more and more, it was so open and natural, "come, do not make me speak ill of my own administration, through affection for my youth."

"But your Excellency will not forbid me to lament my lost fortune, my ruined family?"

"You see, Countess, what it is not to go with the times, not to sacrifice to the idols of the day."

"Alas, Monseigneur, those idols care not for worshippers who come with empty hands!"

"What can you know about them?"

"I?"

"Yes; you have never tried them, I think."

"Oh, Monseigneur, you are so good! You speak to me really like a friend."

"Well, are we not of about the same age, Countess?"

"Oh! why, am I not twenty years old, — and you, Monseigneur, a simple advocate again? You would plead for me, and I should gain my suit."

"Unhappily, we are no longer twenty years of age, Countess," said the vice-chancellor, with a gallant sigh; "we must therefore beg those who are of that age to

assist us, since you confess that that is the age of influence. What! do you know no one at court?"

"Some old noblemen, who have left it now, I once knew; but they would blush for their old friend in her poverty. Stay, Monseigneur, I have still the privilege of being received at court! I might go to Versailles; yet of what use would it be? Oh, had I again only my two hundred thousand livres, people would come to visit me! Perform that miracle for me, Monseigneur!"

The vice-chancellor pretended not to hear this last phrase. "In your place," said he, "I should forget the old, as they have forgotten you. I should apply to the young, and beat up for recruits among them. Do you happen to know the princesses at all?"

"They must have forgotten me."

"And besides, they have no influence. Do you know the dauphin?"

"No."

"And after all he is so busy about his archduchess, who is about to arrive, that he can think of nothing else. Let us look among the favorites."

"I don't even know their names."

"M. d'Aguillon?"

"A coxcomb, of whom such shameful things are said,—that he hid in a mill while others were fighting! Fie! fie!"

"Pooh! we must not believe the half of what we hear. Let us look farther."

"Do, Monseigneur; think of some one!"

"Yes; why not? Yes; ha! yes!"

"Speak, Monseigneur, speak!"

"Why not apply to the Countess herself?"

"To Madame Dubarry?" said the old lady, spreading *out her fan.*

"Yes; she is really a kind creature."

"Indeed!"

"And anxious to be useful."

"I fear I am of too ancient a family to please her, Monseigneur."

"You are mistaken, Countess; she tries to attach high families to her."

"Do you think so?" asked the old countess, already beginning to waver in her opposition.

"Do you know her?" said the chancellor.

"No, indeed!"

"Ah, there is the mischief! She is the person who has real influence."

"Yes, yes, she has influence; but I never saw her."

"Nor her sister Chon?"

"No."

"Nor her sister Bischi?"

"No."

"Nor her brother Jean?"

"No."

"Nor her negro Zamore?"

"What! her negro?"

"Yes; her negro is one of the governing powers."

"What! that little fright, whose picture is sold in the streets, who looks like a dressed-up pug-dog?"

"That is he."

"You ask if I know that blackamoor, Monseigneur?" cried the countess, with offended dignity. "How should I know him?"

"Well, well! I see you do not wish to keep your estates, Countess."

"How is that?"

"Because you speak contemptuously of Zamore."

"But what has Zamore to do in the matter?"

"He might gain your suit for you, that is all."

"He, — that Hottentot? How could he gain it for me?"

"By saying to his mistress that it would please him that you should gain it. You know what influence is; he makes his mistress do what he chooses, and she makes the king do what she chooses."

"Then Zamore governs France?"

"Hum!" replied the vice-chancellor, nodding his head. "He has a great deal of influence; and I would rather quarrel with — with the dauphiness, for instance, than with Zamore."

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed the countess, "if it were not a grave person like your Excellency who tells me such things —"

"Oh, I am not the only one who will tell them to you! Everybody can tell them. Ask any of the dukes and peers if they ever forget, when going to Marly or Luciennes, to take comfits for Zamore to put in his mouth, or pearls for him to hang in his ears. I, who speak to you, am I not the chancellor of France, or something very near it? Well, what was I doing when you came in? I was drawing up a governor's commission for Zamore."

"A governor's commission?"

"Yes; Monsieur Zamore is appointed governor of the castle of Luciennes."

"The very same title with which they rewarded the Comte de Béarn after twenty years' service."

"Yes; he was made governor of the castle of Blois. I remember that."

"But what a degradation! Good heavens! the monarchy is ruined then!"

"It is very low, at least; and you know, Countess, when an invalid draws near his end, people try to get all *they* can from him."

"No doubt, no doubt; but the question is how to get near this invalid."

"Do you know what you must do to be well received by Madame Dubarry?"

"What?"

"You must get admitted to her as the bearer of this commission for her negro. It will be an excellent beginning."

"Do you think so, Monseigneur?" said the poor countess, alarmed.

"I am sure of it; but—"

"But what?"

"Do you know any one acquainted with her?"

"No one but yourself, Monseigneur."

"Oh! as for me, it would be difficult for me to introduce you."

"Assuredly," said the poor old lady, tossed to and fro by alternate hopes and fears, "assuredly, fortune is hostile to me! Your Excellency has received me in a manner quite unexpected,—for indeed I did not expect to be admitted to an audience; then you inclined me to pay my court to Madame Dubarry,—I, a Béarn!—and persuaded me to act as go-between for that frightful negro; and now, behold, I cannot even get at that little monster—"

The vice-chancellor began again to stroke his chin, and appeared very thoughtful, when suddenly the usher announced, "M. le Vicomte Jean Dubarry!"

At this name M. de Maupeou made a gesture of amazement, and the countess sank back breathless in her chair.

"Now say that fortune has abandoned you!" cried the vice-chancellor. "Ah, countess, countess, Heaven is working in your favor!" Then turning to the usher, without

giving the old lady time to recover, he desired that the viscount should be admitted instantly. The usher withdrew, and a moment later our old acquaintance Jean Dubarry entered, with his arm in a sling.

After the usual number of bows were made on both sides, and as the countess, trembling and undecided, was trying to rise in order to take leave, — for the vice-chancellor by a slight movement of the head had indicated to her that her audience was ended, — "Pardon me, Monseigneur," said the viscount; "pardon me, Madame, — I interrupt you, I fear. But I beg of you not to go away; I have only two words to say to his Excellency."

The countess sat down again without needing to be urged, her heart full of joy and expectation. "But perhaps, Monsieur, I shall be in your way," she stammered.

"Oh, Madame, not at all, not at all! I merely wish to lodge a short complaint with his Excellency."

"A complaint! — against whom?" exclaimed the vice-chancellor.

"An attack upon me, Monseigneur! an assassination! One cannot pass over such things as that. Let them abuse us, make ballads about us, blacken us, — we can survive all that; but when it comes to cutting our throats, — *mordieu!* that is dangerous!"

"Explain the affair, I beg," said the vice-chancellor, pretending to be very much horrified.

"It is easily done. But I fear I am interrupting this lady's audience."

"The Comtesse de Béarn," said the vice-chancellor, introducing the old lady to the Vicomte Jean Dubarry.

Dubarry drew back gracefully to make his bow, the countess to make her own; and both saluted as ceremoniously as if they had been at court.

"After you, Monsieur le Vicomte," said she.

"Madame la Comtesse, I would not be guilty of such treason against gallantry."

"Oh, Monsieur! my business concerns only money, — in yours honor is concerned; yours is therefore more urgent."

"Then, Madame," said the viscount, "since it is your wish, I shall take advantage of your obliging permission." And he related his tale to the chancellor, who listened gravely.

"You will require witnesses," said Monsieur de Maupeou, after a moment's reflection.

"Ah!" cried Dubarry, "how easily one discovers even in those words, the upright judge, who can be influenced only by irrefutable truth! Well, I can procure witnesses."

"Monseigneur," said the countess, "one is found already."

"Who is that witness?" they asked together.

"I myself," the countess replied.

"You!" exclaimed M. de Maupeou.

"Monsieur," said she, addressing the viscount, "did not this affair happen at the village of Lachaussée?"

"Yes, Madame."

"At the post-house?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will be your witness. I passed through the place where the attack was made on you, two hours after it happened."

"Really, Madame?" said the chancellor.

"Yes," continued the countess, "and everybody was talking of what had just taken place."

"Take care!" said the viscount, "take care, Madame! If you consent to aid me in this matter, very likely the Choiseuls will find some way to make you repent of it."

"Ah!" said the vice-chancellor, "and the more easily that the Comtesse de Béarn is engaged in a lawsuit, her chance of gaining which is very doubtful, I am afraid."

"Oh, Monseigneur," cried the old lady, putting her hand to her head, "I roll from abyss to abyss!"

"Lean upon the viscount," said the chancellor, in a whisper; "he has an arm powerful to assist you."

"Only one at present," said Dubarry, with a simper. "But I know a certain person who has two good arms; they can reach far, and I offer you their aid."

"Oh, Monsieur le Vicomte, are you serious in making me such an offer?"

"It is only service for service, Madame. I accept your aid; you accept mine. Is it agreed?"

"Do I accept yours? Oh, Monsieur, you do me too much honor!"

"Then, Madame, will you take a seat in my carriage? I am just going to pay a visit to my sister."

"Without any reason; without any preparations? Oh, Monsieur, I dare not —"

"You have a reason, Madame," said the vice-chancellor, slipping into her hand Zamore's commission.

"Monseigneur, you are my protecting genius!" cried the old lady. "Monsieur le Vicomte, you are the flower of the French nobility."

"At your service," said the viscount, showing the way to the countess, who started off with the lightness of a bird.

"Thanks for my sister," whispered Jean in the vice-chancellor's ear; "thank you, cousin! But did I play my part well, eh?"

"Admirably," said Maupeou. "Report to the countess how I played mine. But take care! the old lady is *sharp.*"

At that moment the countess turned. The two gentlemen bowed formally to one another, as if taking a ceremonious adieu.

A splendid carriage, with attendants in the royal livery, waited at the door. The old lady took her place in it, quite elated; Jean seated himself beside her, and they departed.

After the king left Madame Dubarry, as we have formerly related, after a very cold and constrained reception, the countess was left alone with Chon and her brother, who had not appeared at first, for fear that his wound might be examined, it being in reality very trifling. The result of this family council was that the countess, instead of going to Luciennes, as she had told the king she was about to do, set off for Paris. She had there, in the Rue de Valois, a snug little house which served as a place of rendezvous for all her family, every member of which was constantly running backward and forward, hither and thither, as business or pleasure led them. The countess, being installed in this domicile, took a book and waited. Meantime the viscount arranged his batteries.

It might be about half-past seven by the large dial of the Church of St. Eustache, when the Comtesse de Béarn and Vicomte Dubarry passed by on their way to his sister's. The conversation on her side expressed great reluctance to avail herself of the good fortune which had fallen in her way. On his, there was the assumption of a sort of dignity in being her patron, with repeated exclamations at the happy chance which enabled him to introduce her to the Comtesse Dubarry. In return, the old lady praised unceasingly the politeness and affability of the vice-chancellor. This exchange of falsehoods did not affect the speed of the horses, and they reached their destination a few minutes before eight o'clock.

"Permit me, Madame," said the viscount, leaving the old lady in an ante-room, "to inform the Comtesse Dubarry of the honor awaiting her."

"Oh, Monsieur!" said the countess, "do not, I entreat you, allow my unseasonable visit to disturb her."

Jean approached Zamore, who was watching at one of the windows for his return, and whispered something in his ear.

"What a dear little negro!" cried the countess; "is he your sister's, Monsieur?"

"Yes, he is one of her favorites, Madame."

"I congratulate her."

At this moment a footman opened the folding doors of the salon where Madame Dubarry usually granted audiences, and requested the countess to enter. While the old lady was sighing over the luxurious furniture of the apartment, Jean had gone to find his sister,

"Is it really she?" asked Madame Dubarry.

"In flesh and blood!"

"Does she suspect anything?"

"Nothing in the world."

"And how did the Vice behave?"

"Admirably! Everything conspired to favor us."

"Do not let us leave her too long alone, lest she should suspect something."

"You are right; for I assure you she seems to me cunning enough. Where is Chon?"

"At Versailles, you know."

"Well, she must not by any means let herself be seen."

"Oh, I warned her!"

"Now, Princess, enter."

Madame Dubarry gently pushed open the door of her boudoir and entered the salon.

All the ceremonial enjoined by the etiquette of those days was scrupulously performed by the two actresses, mutually desirous of pleasing. Madame Dubarry was the first to speak. "I have already thanked my brother, Madame," she said, "for having procured me the honor of this visit; allow me now to thank you also for having consented to his wish."

"I know not, Madame," replied the old lady, "in what terms to thank you for this gracious reception of me."

"Madame," said the countess in her turn, with a motion of profound respect, "it is only due to a lady of your rank to place myself at your disposal, if I can be of service to you in any way."

And the three reverences having been made on each side, the countess invited Madame de Béarn to be seated.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ZAMORE'S COMMISSION.

"MADAME," said the favorite, "pray let me hear your wishes; I am all attention."

"Permit me, sister," said Jean, who continued standing, "to disabuse your mind of the idea that the Comtesse de Béarn comes with a petition; not at all, — the chancellor has simply asked her to perform a little office for him."

The old lady turned a grateful look on the viscount, and held out to the countess the patent signed by the vice-chancellor, declaring Luciennes a royal castle, and Zamore its governor.

"Then it is I who am the person obliged," said the countess, glancing at the document; "if I could only be so fortunate, Madame, as to be of any service to you in return."

"Oh, that you can readily be!" exclaimed the old lady, with a frankness which enchanted the brother and sister.

"Tell me how, Madame; speak, I entreat you."

"You were kind enough to say that my name is not quite unknown to you, Madame."

"Unknown? — a Béarn!"

"Then you have perhaps heard of a lawsuit which threatens my whole property."

"Oh, yes! A suit between you and the family of the Saluces?"

"Alas, Madame, yes!"

"I know all about it, Madame; I heard his Majesty the other evening speak of it to my cousin the vice-chancellor."

"His Majesty has spoken of my lawsuit?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And in what terms?"

"Alas! my dear Madame!" and Madame Dubarry shook her head.

"As lost, as lost, — was it not?" exclaimed the old lady, in agony.

"If I must speak the truth, Madame, it was."

"His Majesty said so?"

"His Majesty had too much prudence and delicacy to give a pronounced opinion, but he seemed to regard the Saluces as already in possession of the estate."

"Oh, Heavens! Madame, if his Majesty were but rightly informed on the subject, — if he knew that all this was about a debt that has been paid! Yes, Madame, the two hundred thousand francs have been paid. I have not a receipt for the money, it is true; but I have moral proofs that it was paid. I could, if I were allowed to plead in person before the parliament, demonstrate by inference —"

"By inference?" exclaimed Madame Dubarry, who did not understand one word of what she said, but who appeared to pay the most serious attention.

"Yes, Madame, by inference."

"The proof by inference is admissible," said Jean.

"Do you think so, Monsieur?" asked the old lady.

"Yes, I think it is," replied the viscount, with profound gravity.

"Well, then, by inference I could prove that the bond for two hundred thousand francs, with the interest accumulated, amounting to a total of about one million, —

I could prove that this bond, bearing date 1406, was discharged by Guy Gaston, the fourth Comte de Béarn, on his deathbed in 1417; for there it is written by his own hand in his will, — 'Being on my deathbed, and *owing nothing to any man*, and ready to appear before God —'"

"Well?" said Madame Dubarry.

"Well, Madame, if he owed nothing to any man, he owed nothing to the family of the Saluces; otherwise he would have said, 'owing two hundred thousand francs,' instead of saying, 'owing nothing to any man.'"

"Undoubtedly he would have said so!" exclaimed Jean.

"But have you no other proof?" asked the favorite.

"Than his word? None, Madame; but he was called 'Gaston the Irreproachable.'"

"And your opponents have the bond?"

"Yes, they have; and that is just what makes the affair more intricate."

She might have said, "That is just what clears up the matter;" but she looked at things from her own point of view.

"So your conviction is, Madame, that the bond was discharged?" said Jean.

"Yes, Monsieur, that is my decided conviction," exclaimed Madame de Béarn, warmly.

"Do you know," said the countess, turning to her brother, as if deeply penetrated by that conviction, "the proof by inference, as the Comtesse de Béarn calls it, changes the face of things wonderfully?"

"Oh, wonderfully!" returned Jean.

"And very unpleasantly for my opponents," continued the countess. "The terms of Gaston IV.'s will are *most* positive, — 'owing nothing to any man —'"

"It is not only clear, it is logical," said Jean. "He owed nothing to any man; therefore, of course, he had paid what he had owed."

"Therefore he had paid what he had owed," repeated the Comtesse Dubarry.

"Oh, Madame, why are you not my judge?" exclaimed the old lady.

"Formerly," said the viscount, "we should not have had recourse to the tribunals to settle an affair of that kind; the judgment of Heaven would have determined it. For my part, I am so convinced of the goodness of your cause that, did the old custom still exist, I would willingly offer myself as your champion."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

"Yes, I should act as did my grandfather, Dubarry-Moore, who had the honor of being connected with the royal family of the Stuarts, when he fought in the lists for the beautiful Edith of Scarborough, and made his adversary confess that he lied in his throat. But unhappily," continued the viscount, with a sigh of disdain for the degeneracy of the age, "we live not in those glorious times, and gentlemen, when they claim their rights, must submit their cause to the judgment of a set of pettifoggers who have not the sense to understand a phrase so clear as — 'owing nothing to any man.'"

"But, brother," said Madame Dubarry, "it is three hundred years since those words were written; and it is necessary to consider what, I think, in courts of justice is called 'prescription.'"

"Oh! no matter, no matter. I am certain that if his Majesty heard the Comtesse de Béarn state her case herself as she has done to us —"

"I should convince his Majesty, — should I not, Monsieur?"

"I am sure you would."

"Yes, but how am I to obtain an audience of his Majesty?"

"You must come and visit me at Luciennes; and as his Majesty does me the honor of coming sometimes to see me there —"

"My dear," interrupted the viscount, "that is all very well; but it depends on chance."

"Viscount," replied the favorite, with a sweet smile, "you know that I depend a good deal on chance, and I have no reason to complain."

"Yes, but the Comtesse de Béarn might go to Luciennes for a week or a fortnight, and yet not meet his Majesty."

"That is true."

"In the mean time, her cause is to come on next Monday or Tuesday."

"On Tuesday, Monsieur."

"And this is Friday evening."

"Ah, then," said Madame Dubarry, with an air of disappointment, "we must not reckon upon that."

"What shall we do?" said the viscount, as if in deep thought. "What a devil of a business!"

"I might have an audience at Versailles," suggested the old lady, timidly.

"Oh! you will not obtain it."

"But through your influence, Madame?"

"Oh! my influence would be of no avail. His Majesty detests business matters; and besides, his mind is now full of one thing only."

"The parliaments?" asked Madame de Béarn.

"No, — my presentation."

"Ah!" said the old lady.

"For you know, Madame, in spite of the opposition of

Monsieur de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont, the king has decided that I shall be presented."

"I was not aware, Madame."

"It is a settled affair," said Jean.

"And when will the presentation take place, Madame?"

"Oh! very soon."

"You see," said Jean, "the king wishes it to be before the arrival of the dauphiness, that he may invite my sister to share the festivities at Compiègne."

"Ah! I understand. Then you have all the arrangements made for your presentation?" said the old countess, sighing.

"Oh, yes!" replied the viscount; "the Baronne d'Alogny — Do you know the Baronne d'Alogny?"

"No, Monsieur. Alas! I scarcely know any one now; it is twenty years since I was at court."

"Well, it is the Baronne d'Alogny who is to present my sister. The king loads her with favors; her husband is chamberlain, — he is to be raised from a baron to a count; the son is to go into the guards; her orders on the king's privy purse are to be made payable by the city of Paris; and the day of the presentation she is to receive twenty thousand crowns paid down. So she is eager for it, you may be sure!"

"Yes, I can readily understand that," said the old lady, smiling.

"Oh! but now I think of it —" cried Jean.

"Of what?" asked the Comtesse Dubarry.

"What a misfortune, what a misfortune!" he continued, "that I did not meet Madame a week sooner at our cousin the vice-chancellor's!"

"Why?"

"Why, we had no positive engagement then with the Baronne d'Alogny."

"Dear brother, you speak like a sphinx; I do not understand you."

"You do not understand?"

"No."

"I will wager something that Madame understands!"

"Pardon, Monsieur, but I seek in vain —"

"Last week you had not decided who should present you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Very well! Madame — But perhaps I am going too far; I am taking too great a liberty."

"No, Monsieur; speak."

"Madame could have presented you, and the king would have done for her what he is going to do for the Baronne d'Alogny."

"Alas!" said the old lady, opening her eyes.

"Oh! if you knew," continued Jean, "all the favors his Majesty heaped on the family of the baronne as soon as he knew she had offered to introduce Jeanne! There was only one thing in the affair that vexed him —"

"Ah! one thing vexed him?"

"Yes, — only one. 'One thing vexes me,' said he; 'the lady who presents the Comtesse Dubarry I should have wished to bear an historical name;' and as he said that, he looked at the picture of Charles I. by Vandyck."

"Yes, I understand," said the old lady; "his Majesty turned to that picture on account of the alliance between the Dubarry-Moores and the Stuarts, of which you spoke just now."

"Precisely."

"The fact is," said the old lady, with a manner impossible to describe, "I never heard of the family of D'Alogny."

"A good family, however," said the countess; "they

have brought forward all the necessary proofs, or nearly all."

"*Pardieu!*" cried Jean, suddenly starting in his chair.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Madame Dubarry, scarcely able to refrain from laughing outright at the contortions of her brother-in-law.

"Monsieur has pricked himself, perhaps?" asked the old lady, anxiously.

"No," said Jean, sinking slowly back again into his chair; "it was an idea which just then occurred to me."

"What idea?" said the countess, laughing; "it almost upset you."

"It must have been a good one," said Madame de Béarn.

"Excellent!"

"Give it to us then."

"It has only one fault."

"Well?"

"It is impracticable."

"No matter; let us hear it."

"Suppose you were to tell the Baronne d'Alogny the king's remark when he looked at Charles I.'s portrait?"

"Oh, brother, that would not be polite!"

The old lady sighed.

"It is vexatious too," continued the viscount, as if speaking to himself; "the affair could have been so easily arranged. The Comtesse de Béarn, who not only bears such an ancient name, but is besides a woman of distinguished talent, might have offered herself in the place of the Baronne d'Alogny. She would have gained her lawsuit; her son would have got a commission as lieutenant in the guards; and as Madame must, of course, have been put to considerable expense in her frequent visits to Paris, there would have been adequate compen-

sation allowed. Such an opportunity does not occur twice in a lifetime!"

"Alas, no!" exclaimed the old lady, quite overcome by this unforeseen blow.

The fact is that any one in the position of the old litigant would have felt inclined to echo her exclamation, and, like her, would have sunk back, overwhelmed, in the easy chair.

"Now, brother," said the countess, in a tone of great compassion, "you see you are giving pain to Madame de Béarn. Was it not enough that I was forced to tell her I could do nothing for her with the king before my presentation?"

"Oh! if I could delay my suit," sighed the countess.

"For only eight days," said Dubarry.

"Yes, in eight days," resumed Madame de Béarn; "in eight days Madame will be presented."

"Yes; but the king will be at Compiègne in eight days; he will be in the midst of festivities; the dauphiness will have arrived."

"Stop! I have another idea. No — yes — no — yes, yes! — I have hit it!"

"What is it, Monsieur?" said Madame de Béarn, whose whole soul seemed to hang upon the viscount's lips, and who repeated mechanically the monosyllables he uttered.

"Your presentation is still a secret; no one knows that you have found a lady to present you?"

"No, for the king wishes it to fall like a thunderbolt on the court."

"Well, the Comtesse de Béarn will demand an audience of the king, as she is not supposed to know any more about your presentation than others, for the purpose of offering to present you. The king, at such an offer

from a lady of her rank, will be delighted ; he will receive her, thank her, will ask her what he can do for her. She will introduce the subject of her lawsuit, and explain her views respecting it; his Majesty will give them a favorable consideration, and the suit which she thought lost will be won!"

The favorite fixed her eager gaze on the old lady, who probably began to suspect that there was some snare laid for her. "I am a poor unknown creature," said she; "how do you suppose that his Majesty —"

"It is enough, I think, in such circumstances to have shown good-will," said Jean.

"If it is only a question of good-will —" said Madame de Béarn, hesitating.

"It is not a bad idea," replied Madame Dubarry, smiling; "but perhaps Madame would not like to descend to anything like a trick, even to gain her lawsuit."

"Quite true, Madame," said the old lady, hoping to get off by this means. "I would much rather do you some real service to obtain your friendship."

"Indeed, nothing could be more gracious!" said the favorite, with a slight shade of irony, which did not escape the penetration of Madame de Béarn.

"Well, I have still another means," said Jean. The old lady listened anxiously.

"Really, brother, your imagination is as fertile in resources as that of M. de Beaumarchais. Let us hear this last idea."

"It is that the Comtesse de Béarn shall render you the real service which she wishes to. Can you not persuade the Baronne d'Alogny to yield her rights to the countess? You need not repeat to her too frankly the king's remark; but you could, with your tact, make her understand that he preferred the countess's ancient name."

This time the attack was direct; he thought there could be no evasive answer. But the countess found one. "I should not like to interfere with that lady's arrangements," said she; "among persons of quality a certain attention to these engagements must be observed."

Madame Dubarry made a gesture of anger and disappointment, but the viscount by a look restrained her. "Observe, Madame," said he, "I urge nothing upon you. Like many other persons, you have a lawsuit, which very naturally you wish to gain. It appears that you are likely to lose it; you are in despair. Just at that moment I arrive; I am moved with sympathy for you; I take an interest in an affair which does not in the remotest degree concern me; I endeavor to make it turn out favorably for you. I am wrong; let us say no more about it!" and Jean rose from his seat.

"Oh, Monsieur!" exclaimed the old lady, in despair, for she now saw that the Dubarrys, who had been till then indifferent, were going to use their influence against her; "oh, Monsieur! believe me, I acknowledge and am grateful for your good-will."

"As for myself," replied Jean, with well-assumed indifference, "it matters not whether my sister be presented by the Baronne d'Alogny, the Comtesse de Polastron, or the Comtesse de Béarn."

"Of course, Monsieur."

"Only I confess I felt annoyed that the royal favor should be bestowed on some mean spirit, actuated by sordid interest, — a spirit yielding to our power because it is impossible to undermine it."

"Oh, that is what will most probably happen!" said the favorite.

"While," continued Jean, "the Comtesse de Béarn, almost an entire stranger to us, and coming forward with-

out any solicitation on our part, and prompted solely by her kindness and good nature to offer her services, appears to me worthy of all the advantages which would thereby accrue to her."

The old lady was probably about to disclaim that good will which the viscount did her the honor to attribute to her, but Madame Dubarry did not give her time.

"The fact is," said she, "the king would not refuse anything to a lady who would act as you suggest."

"What! the king would not refuse anything, do you say?"

"He would hasten to meet that person's wishes; so that with your own ears you might hear him say to the vice-chancellor: 'M. de Maupeou, I wish every one to be agreeable to Madame de Béarn, — do you understand?' But it appears that Madame la Comtesse sees difficulties in the way. Very good! You will at least do me the justice, I hope, to believe that I have a sincere wish to serve you, Madame;" and the viscount bowed.

"Indeed, Monsieur, my heart is filled with gratitude to you!"

"Oh, do not speak of it!" said the gallant viscount.

"But the Baronne d'Alogny would not yield up her right," resumed the old lady, after a short pause.

"Still, his Majesty would not be the less grateful to you for your offer."

"But supposing," persisted the old lady, who was determined to view the matter in the worst light, in order to see to the bottom of the affair, — "supposing the baronne would yield her privilege to me, one would not wish to take from that lady the advantages — "

"The king's kindness is inexhaustible, Madame," said the favorite.

"If I offered my services, Madame," replied the old

lady, yielding more and more, allured as she was both by her interest and by the comedy they were playing with her, "I should leave out of view the gaining of my cause; for, to say the truth, a suit which every one thinks lost to-day will not be easily gained to-morrow."

"Oh, but if the king were favorable!" exclaimed Jean, eager to combat her new doubts.

"Well," said the favorite, "I confess I am of the countess's opinion, Viscount."

"You are?" said he, staring at her with open eyes.

"Yes; I think it would be more honorable for a lady of her ancient name to allow her suit to go as it may. Then there would be nothing binding on the king, — nothing to check his munificence to her; and if he were unwilling — especially in his present relation to his parliaments — to interfere with the course of justice, he might offer her compensation for the loss of the suit."

"That would be more honorable," the viscount hastened to say. "Oh, yes, little sister, I am of your opinion!"

"Ah!" sighed the old lady, "how could he offer anything to compensate for the loss of two hundred thousand francs?"

"Why, in the first place," replied Madame Dubarry, "there might, for instance, be a royal gift of one hundred thousand francs."

The partners in this scheme looked at their victim with eager eyes.

"I have a son —" said she.

"So much the better! — one more loyal servant of the State."

"But do you think, Madame, there would be anything done for my son?"

"I can answer for it," said Jean, "that the least he might expect would be a lieutenancy in the guards."

"Have you any other relations?" inquired the Comtesse Dubarry."

"I have a nephew."

"Well, we should find out something for your nephew," said the viscount.

"I think we may leave that in your hands, Viscount," said the favorite, laughing, "after the proofs of your resources which you have given us."

"Well, if his Majesty did all this for you, Madame," said the viscount, who, obeying Horace's maxim, pushed on toward the end in view, "would you think the king reasonable?"

"I should think him generous beyond all expression, and should offer you, Madame, all my thanks, — convinced that to you alone I should be indebted for his generosity."

"Then," asked the favorite, "you really take our proposal seriously into consideration?"

"Yes, Madame, most seriously," replied the old lady, turning pale at the very thought of the obligation to which she pledged herself.

"And you permit me to mention you to his Majesty?"

"Pray do me that honor," she replied, with a deep sigh.

"Madame, I shall do so with the least possible delay, — indeed, this very evening," said the favorite, rising to terminate the interview. "And in the mean time, I trust that I have secured your friendship."

"I feel so highly honored by yours, Madame," said the old lady, beginning her reverences again, "that I almost feel as if all this were a dream."

"Let us see, once more," said Jean, wishing to fix the matter firmly in the old countess's mind. "One hundred thousand francs first, to make up for the loss of the suit;

a lieutenancy for the young count; and something for a nephew."

"Something?"

"I shall find out something good; that is my affair."

"And when shall I have the honor of seeing you again, Madame?" asked the old lady.

"To-morrow morning my carriage will be at your door to take you to Luciennes; the king will be there. To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I shall have fulfilled my promise; his Majesty will be informed, and will expect you."

"Allow me to accompany you, Madame," said Jean, offering his arm.

"By no means, Monsieur; remain here, I entreat you."

Jean insisted. "To the top of the stairs, at least."

"Since you insist on it —" and Madame de Béarn took the viscount's arm.

"Zamore!" cried the countess.

Zamore appeared.

"Light this lady downstairs, and order my brother's carriage.

The two ladies exchanged a last reverence. At the top of the staircase Jean bade the old countess adieu, and returned to his sister, while Madame de Béarn majestically descended the grand staircase. Zamore marched first; then came two footmen with lights; and then the old lady, her train (rather a short one) borne by a third footman.

The brother and sister watched at the window, following with their eyes to the very carriage the precious chaperon, sought with so much care, and found with so much difficulty. Just as she reached the door, a chaise entered the courtyard, and a young lady sprang out.

"Ah, Maîtresse Chon!" cried Zamore, opening h'

enormous mouth to its widest extent. "How do you do this evening, Maîtresse Chon?"

The Comtesse de Béarn stood petrified. In the new arrival she recognized her visitor,— the false daughter of Maître Flageot. Dubarry hurriedly opened a window, and made frantic signs to his sister; but she did not see them.

"Has that little fool Gilbert been here?" inquired Chon of a lackey, without perceiving the countess.

"No, Madame," replied one of the footmen; "we have not seen him."

It was just then that, looking up, she saw her brother, and following the direction of his hand, discovered Madame de Béarn. Chon recognized her, uttered a little cry, hastily pulled down her hood, and rushed into the vestibule. The old lady, without appearing to have remarked anything, got into the carriage and gave her address to the coachman.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE KING GETS TIRED.

The king, who had gone to Marly, as he had said he would, ordered his carriage at three o'clock in the afternoon, and drove to Luciennes. He supposed that Madame Dubarry, on receiving his note, would immediately leave Versailles, and hasten thither to wait for him.

He was rather surprised, therefore, on entering the château, to find Zamore — looking very little like a governor — occupied in plucking out the feathers of a parrot, which, in return, was trying to bite him. The two favorites were rivals, like the Duc de Choiseul and the Comtesse Dubarry.

The king installed himself in the small salon, and dismissed his attendants. Although the most inquisitive gentleman in his kingdom, he was not in the habit of questioning servants or lackeys. But Zamore was neither a servant nor a lackey; he occupied a middle place between the monkey and the parrot. The king therefore questioned Zamore. "Is the countess in the garden?"

"No, Master." This word the favorite, in one of her whims, had ordered to take the place of "Majesty," at Luciennes.

"Is she at the lake then?"

At very great expense the bed of a lake had been excavated on the summit of the hill. It was fed with water from the aqueduct, and inhabited by great numbers of the finest carp, brought from Versailles.

"No, Master," again answered Zamore.

"Where is she, then?"

"In Paris, Master."

"What! Did the countess not come to Luciennes?"

"No, Master; but she sent Zamore."

"What to do?"

"To wait for the king."

"Ah, ha! so you are delegated to receive me? Very agreeable indeed! Thank you, Countess, thank you! The society of Zamore is charming!" And he rose from his chair rather piqued.

"Oh, no! the king is not to have the society of Zamore," said the negro.

"Why not?"

"Because Zamore is going away."

"Where are you going?"

"To Paris."

"Then I am to be left alone? Better and better. But why do you go to Paris?"

"To find Maîtresse Dubarry and tell her the king is at Luciennes."

"Oh! the countess desired you to tell me that, then?"

"Yes, Master."

"And did she tell you what I was to do till she came?"

"She said you were to sleep."

"Ah!" said the king to himself, "she will not be long delayed, and she has some surprise for me;" then he added aloud, "Go, then, and bring back the countess. But how will you travel?"

"On the great white horse with the scarlet housings."

"And how long does it take for the great white horse to go to Paris?"

"I do not know," said the negro boy; "but he goes fast, fast, fast! Zamore likes to go fast."

"Indeed! It is at least very fortunate that Zamore likes to go fast." And he stationed himself at the window to see Zamore depart. A tall footman lifted the negro on the horse, and with the happy ignorance of childhood, he set off at a gallop on his gigantic steed.

The king, being left alone, asked a footman at last if there were anything new at Luciennes. The servant replied that there was only Monsieur Boucher, who was painting the countess's boudoir.

"Oh, Boucher, poor Boucher! is he here?" said the king, with a slight satisfaction; "and where is he?"

"In the summer-house; shall I show your Majesty the way to it?"

"No, no; I will go and see the carp. Give me a knife."

"A knife, Sire?"

"Yes, and a large loaf."

The valet returned, bringing a large loaf, with a long knife stuck in it, on a china plate. The king made a sign to the valet to accompany him, and with a pleased air proceeded toward the lake. The feeding of carp was a traditional occupation in the Bourbon family, the Grand Monarque never missing it for a single day. Louis XV. seated himself on a mossy bank where there was a charming view. There lay the little lake, with its velvet slopes of turf; beyond it a village nestled between two hills; farther off, the towers of St.-Germain, with their wooded terraces, and farther still, the blue declivities of Sannois and Cormeilles; while above all this the sky, gray and rose-colored, hung like a magnificent cupola. The weather had been stormy, and the foliage of the trees looked dark and heavy against the pale green of the meadows; the waters of the lake, glassy and immovable as a vast surface of oil, were disturbed from time to time

by a fish darting with a flash like that of silver to seize the unwary fly; then was the surface covered with wide-spreading circles of alternate black and white. At the margin might be perceived the enormous snouts of a number of fish, which, fearless of hook or net, sucked the leaves of pendant plants, and with their huge, fixed eyes, apparently without sight, stared at the gray lizards and green frogs sporting among the bulrushes.

When the king, like a man skilled in the art of killing time, had looked at the landscape on all sides; when he had counted the houses in the village, and the villages in the distance, — he took the plate with the loaf, placed it beside him, and began to cut off large pieces of the bread.

The carp heard the sound of the knife in the crust; and accustomed to that noise, which announced their dinner-hour, they immediately flocked as close as possible to the bank, to show themselves to his Majesty and solicit their daily meal. They would have done the same for any footman in his service; but the king naturally thought that all this trouble was for him alone. He threw in, one after another, the pieces of bread, which, first disappearing for an instant, and then returning to the surface, were contended for for some time; then, crumbled by the action of the water, were seized, and seen no more. It was indeed curious and amusing to see all these crusts pushed hither and thither by the invisible snouts, and tossed on the surface of the water, until the moment when they were swallowed.

At the end of about half an hour his Majesty, having in that time patiently cut one hundred bits of crust, had the satisfaction of seeing that not one remained floating. He began now, however, to feel rather tired of the sport, and it occurred to him that Monsieur Boucher might amuse

him a little; he would not be as good a resource as the carp, but in the country we must take what we can get.

Louis therefore turned toward the summer-house. Boucher had heard that he was at Luciennes; and though he went on painting, or seeming to paint, he followed the king with his eyes, saw him turn in the direction of the summer-house, and, radiant with joy, he adjusted his ruffles and mounted on his ladder, for he had been warned not to appear to know that the king was there. He heard a step on the floor of the room, and applied himself to his representation of a fat Cupid stealing a rose from a shepherdess in a blue satin gown and straw hat. His hand trembled, his heart beat. The king stopped on the threshold. "Ah, Boucher," cried he, "how you smell of turpentine!" and he walked on.

Poor Boucher, although he knew the king had no taste for the fine arts, did expect some other kind of compliment, and was near falling from his ladder. He came down and went away with the tears in his eyes, without scraping his palette or washing his brushes, which in general he was so careful to do.

His Majesty pulled out his watch; it was seven o'clock. He returned to the house, teased the monkey, made the parrot speak, pulled out all the drawers of the cabinets one after another, and ransacked their contents. Evening drew on. The king was not fond of darkness, and the apartments were lighted up. But he did not like solitude either. "My horses in a quarter of an hour!" said he. "Faith!" he added, "I will just give her one quarter of an hour, — not a minute longer." As he said this, he stretched himself on a sofa opposite the fireplace, to watch the course of the fifteen minutes, — that is, of nine hundred seconds. At the four hundredth beat of the time-

piece, which represented a blue elephant carrying a pink sultana, he was asleep.

As may be supposed, the footman, who came to announce his Majesty's carriage, took care not to awake him. The result of this attention to his august slumber was that when he awoke of his own accord, he found himself face to face with the Comtesse Dubarry, who was looking at him with her eyes wide open. Zamore stood in a corner waiting for orders.

"Ah! you are here at last, Countess," said the king, sitting up on the sofa.

"Yes, Sire, here I am," said the countess; "and here I have been a pretty long time."

"Oh! a pretty long time?"

"An hour at least. But how your Majesty does sleep!"

"Faith, Countess, you were not here, and I was getting shockingly tired; and then I sleep so badly at night. Do you know that I was on the point of going away?"

"Yes, I saw your Majesty's carriage at the door."

The king looked at his watch. "What, half-past ten?" he exclaimed; "then I have slept nearly three hours!"

"After that, Sire, say that you cannot sleep well at Luciennes!"

"Oh, faith, very well! But what the devil do I see there?" said he, looking at Zamore.

"You see the governor of Luciennes, Sire."

"Not yet, not yet," said the king, laughing; "the little wretch has put on his uniform before he is appointed. He reckons on my word, then?"

"Sire, your word is sacred, and he is right in reckoning on it. But Zamore has something more than your word, or rather something less, — he has his commission; the

vice-chancellor sent it to me. The oath is now the only formality which is wanting; make him swear quickly, and then betake himself to his post."

"Approach, Governor," said the king.

Zamore came forward. He was dressed in a uniform with an embroidered collar and a captain's epaulettes, with short breeches, silk stockings, and a sword like a spit. He walked with a stiff, measured step, an enormous three-corned hat under his arm.

"Will he know what to swear?" asked the king.

"Oh, yes, Sire! try him."

"Advance," said the king, looking curiously at the black puppet.

"On your knees!" said the countess.

"Swear!" said the king.

The child placed one hand on his heart, the other in the king's hand, and said, "I swear fealty and homage to my master and mistress; I swear to defend to the death the castle in my keeping, and to eat the last pot of preserves before surrendering, should I be attacked."

The king laughed as much at the form of the oath as at the gravity with which Zamore pronounced it. "In return for this oath," he replied, with suitable gravity, "I confer on you the sovereign rights of justice, high and low, on all inhabiting the air, earth, fire, and water of this castle."

"Thank you, Master," said Zamore, rising.

"And now," said the king, "go and show off your fine clothes in the kitchen, and leave us alone; go!"

As Zamore went out at one door, Chon entered by another.

"Ah! you here, little Chon?" said the king. And he took her on his knees and kissed her. "Come, my little Chon," he continued, "from you I shall get the truth."

"Take care, Sire, that you are not disappointed in your expectations!" said Chon. "The truth! I think that if I were to tell the truth, it would be for the first time in my life. If you wish to learn the truth, apply to my sister; she is incapable of speaking falsely."

"Is that true, Countess?"

"Sire, Chon has too good an opinion of me. Bad example has ruined me; and from this evening forth I am determined to lie like a real countess, if the truth will not serve me."

"Oh, ho!" said the king; "I suspect Chon has something to conceal from me. I must get from the police a report of what has occurred to-day."

"From which police, Sire, — Sartines's, or mine?"

"Oh, from Sartines's!"

"What will you pay him for it?"

"If he tell me anything worth hearing, I shall not be niggardly."

"Well, then, give my police the preference, and take my report. I will serve you — royally."

"You will even sell your own secrets?"

"Why not, if I am well paid?"

"Come, then, let me hear the report, — but no fibs, remember!"

"Sire, you insult me."

"I mean, no equivocations."

"Well, Sire, get your funds ready; I am about to begin my report."

"They are ready," said the king, jingling some money in his pocket.

"In the first place, the Comtesse Dubarry was seen in Paris, in the Rue de Valois, about two o'clock in the afternoon."

"Well, I know that; go on!"

"About six o'clock Zamore proceeded to join her there."

"Very possibly; but what was Madame Dubarry doing in the Rue de Valois?"

"She went to her house there."

"I understand; but why did she go to her house?"

"To await her godmother."

"Her godmother!" said the king, with a grimace he could not wholly conceal; "then she is going to be baptized?"

"Yes, Sire, at the great fonts of Versailles."

"Faith, she is wrong; paganism agrees so well with her!"

"Well, Sire, you know the proverb, 'Every one wishes what he does not possess.'"

"So that we still wish for a godmother?"

"And we have one, Sire."

The king started, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I like that movement, Sire; it shows that your Majesty would be annoyed at the defeat of the Grammonts, the Guémenées, and all the hypocrites of the court," said the countess.

"I beg your pardon!"

"Yes, I am sure you are in league with those persons."

"In league? Countess, learn one thing, that the king leagues only with kings."

"True; but all your kings are friends of the Duc de Choiseul."

"Let us return to your godmother, Countess."

"With all my heart, Sire."

"You have succeeded in manufacturing one, then?"

"I found one ready made, and very well made, — a Comtesse de Béarn, of a family some of whose members

have been princes. She will not dishonor the relative of the relatives of the Stuarts, I hope!"

"The Comtesse de Béarn!" exclaimed the king, with surprise. "I know of but one, who lives somewhere near Verdun."

"It is the very same; she has come to Paris on purpose to present me."

"Ha! and when is the affair to take place?"

"To-morrow, at eleven o'clock in the morning, I am to give her a private audience, and at the same time, if it be not too presumptuous, she will request the king to name a day; and you will name the earliest possible, will you not, dear France?"

The king burst into a forced laugh.

"Certainly, certainly," said he, kissing the countess's hand. Then suddenly, "To-morrow, at eleven?" he asked.

"Yes, at breakfast."

"Impossible, my dear Countess."

"Impossible! Why?"

"I shall not breakfast here; I must return this evening."

"What!" said the countess, who felt an icy pang shoot through her heart at these words, "you are going to leave us, Sire?"

"I am forced to do so, dear Countess; I have to meet Sartines on very important business."

"As you please, Sire; but you will at least take supper here, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, I will have supper, I think! Yes, I am rather hungry, — I will stay to supper."

"Order supper, Chon," said the countess, making at the same time a private signal to her, which no doubt referred to some previous arrangements. Chon left the

room. The king had seen the signal in a mirror, and although he could not comprehend its meaning, he suspected some snare. "Ah!" said he, "on second thoughts I think it will be impossible to stay even for supper. I must not lose a moment; I have some papers to sign, — to-day is Saturday."

"As you please, Sire. Shall I order the horses?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Chon!"

Chon re-appeared.

"His Majesty's horses!" said the countess.

"Very well," said Chon, with a smile; and she left the room again. A moment later her voice was heard in the ante-room, ordering the king's carriage.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE KING AMUSES HIMSELF.

The king, delighted at this exercise of his authority, which punished the countess for leaving him alone so long, at the same time that it freed him from the trouble of settling the affair of her presentation, walked toward the door of the salon. Chon entered.

"Well, are my attendants there?"

"No, Sire, there is not one of them in the ante-room."

The king advanced into the ante-room himself. "My attendants!" he cried. No one answered; there was not even an echo in the silent château.

"Who the devil would believe," said the king, returning to the salon, "that I am the grandson of the man who once said, 'I was very near having to wait!'" and he went to a window, opened it, and looked out.

The space in front of the château was as deserted as the ante-rooms, — no horses, no attendants, no guards. Night alone presented itself to the eyes and to the soul in all its calmness and all its majesty. The lovely moon shone brightly on the woods of Chatou, whose lofty summits rustled gently like the waves of the sea rippled by a breeze. The Seine, on whose bosom glittered a long line of light, looked like a gigantic serpent trailing its slow length along, its windings being visible from Bougival to Maisons, that is, for four or five leagues; and then, in the midst of this heavenly scene, a nightingale burst forth with such a sweet and varied song as she gives only in

the month of May, as if those joyous notes found Nature worthy of them in the early days of spring alone, — days which are scarcely come ere they are gone.

All this beauty and harmony were lost on Louis XV., who was not much of a dreamer, poet, or artist, but, on the contrary, a good deal of a sensualist. "Come, Countess!" said he, considerably annoyed, "give the necessary orders, I entreat. What the devil! this jest must have an end."

"Sire," replied the countess, with that charming, pouting air which became her so well, "I do not command here."

"Nor do I," replied the king; "for you see how little I am obeyed."

"It is neither you nor I who command."

"Who is it, then? Is it you, Chon?"

"I?" said the young lady, who was seated on a couch on the other side of the apartment exactly opposite the countess, who occupied a similar one on the near side, — "I find the task of obeying so difficult that I have no inclination for that of commanding."

"But who is the master, then?"

"The governor, Sire, of course."

"M. Zamore?"

"Yes."

"Ah, very true! Well, let some one ring for him."

The countess stretched out her arm with a most graceful air of nonchalance to a silken cord ending in a tassel of beads. A footman, who had no doubt received his lesson beforehand, was ready in the ante-room and appeared.

"The governor," said the king.

"The governor," replied the valet, respectfully, "is on guard, watching over his Majesty's precious life."

"Where is he?"

"Going his rounds, Sire."

"Going his rounds?" repeated the king.

"Yes, with four officers, Sire."

The king could not help smiling. "That is droll enough," said he, "but it need not prevent my horses from being harnessed immediately."

"Sire, the governor ordered the stables to be closed, lest some marauder might enter them."

"And where are my grooms?"

"Gone to bed, Sire."

"Gone to bed! By whose orders?"

"The governor's, Sire."

"And the gates of the castle?"

"Are locked, Sire."

"Very well; then you must get the keys."

"The governor has them at his belt, Sire."

"A well-guarded castle indeed! *Peste!* what order is kept!"

The footman, seeing that the king ceased to question him, retired. The countess, reclining gracefully on a couch, continued to bite off the leaves of a beautiful rose, beside which her lips seemed like coral. "Come, Sire," said she at length, with a fascinating smile, "I must take compassion on your Majesty; give me your arm, and let us set out in search of some one to help you. Chon, light the way."

Chon went before, ready to apprise them of any dangers which they might encounter. At the very first turn in the corridor the king's nose was saluted by an odor quite sufficient to awaken the appetite of the most fastidious epicure. "Ah, ha! what is that, Countess?" said he, stopping.

"Oh, only supper, Sire! I thought your Majesty

intended doing me the honor of supping at Luciennes, and I made arrangements accordingly."

The king inhaled the gastronomic perfume two or three times, while he reflected that his stomach had been inviting his attention for some time; that it would take half an hour and a great deal of noise to awake his grooms, a quarter more to harness the horses, ten minutes to reach Marly; and when at Marly, where he was not expected, he should find only a cold supper. He still inhaled the seductive perfumes, and, conducted by the countess, he paused before the door of the dining-room. Two covers were placed on the table, which was splendidly lighted and sumptuously laid out.

"*Peste!*" said Louis, "you have a good cook, Countess."

"Oh, Sire, this is only his first effort; the poor devil has been doing wonders to deserve your Majesty's approbation. Indeed, he is so sensitive that he might perhaps, in his disappointment, cut his throat, as poor Vatel did."

"Really? Do you think so?"

"There was to be an omelet of pheasants' eggs, on which he especially prided himself."

"An omelet of pheasants' eggs? I adore omelets of pheasants' eggs."

"What a pity you must go!"

"Well, Countess, we must not vex your cook," said the king, laughing; "and perhaps while we are at supper, Maître Zamore may return from his rounds."

"Ah! Sire, a capital idea," said the countess, unable to conceal her delight at having gained this first step. "Come, Sire, come!"

"But who will wait on us?" said the king, looking round in vain for an attendant.

"Ah, Sire!" said Madame Dubarry, "will your coffee be less agreeable when presented to you by me?"

"No, Countess; and I will even say, when you make it for me."

"Well, come then, Sire."

"Two covers only! Has Chon then had her supper?"

"Sire, I did not venture without your Majesty's express command —"

"Come, come," said the king, taking a plate and cover from a sideboard himself, "come, my little Chon; sit there opposite us."

"Oh, Sire!" said Chon.

"Yes, yes! play the very humble and very obedient subject, you little hypocrite. Sit here, Countess, near me, — beside me. What a beautiful profile you have!"

"Is this the first time you have observed it, dear France?"

"How should I observe it when I am so happy in looking at your full countenance? Decidedly, Countess, your cook is of the first grade. What soup!"

"Then I was right in sending away the other?"

"Quite right."

"Sire, follow my example; you see it will be to your advantage."

"I do not understand you."

"I have dismissed my Choiseul; dismiss yours."

"Countess, no politics. Give me some Madeira."

The king held out his glass; the countess took up a decanter to help him, and as she raised it up, her white fingers and rosy nails were seen to advantage.

"Pour gently and slowly," said the king.

"Not to shake the wine, Sire?"

"No, to give me more time to admire your hand."

"Assuredly, Sire," said the countess, laughing, "your Majesty is in the vein of making discoveries!"

"Faith, yes!" said the king, now in perfect good humor again, "and think I am in the fair way of discovering — "

"A new world?"

"No, I am not so ambitious; besides, I find a kingdom as much as I can manage. No, only an isle, a little nook, an enchanted mountain, a palace of which a certain fair lady will be the Armida, and the entrance to which will be defended by all kinds of monsters."

"Sire," said the countess, presenting the king with a glass of iced champagne, a luxury quite new at that period, "here is some water just drawn from the river Lethe."

"The river Lethe, Countess? are you sure?"

"Yes, Sire; it was poor Jean who brought it from the lower regions, from which he returned with so much difficulty."

"Countess, I drink to his happy resurrection. But no politics, I beg."

"Then I don't know what to talk about, Sire. If you would relate something, — you, who have such a happy gift of telling a story."

"No, but I will repeat to you some verses."

"Verses?"

"Yes, verses. Is there anything surprising in that?"

"I thought your Majesty detested them."

"*Parbleu!* out of each hundred thousand manufactured, ninety thousand are against myself!"

"And those which your Majesty is going to give me, belong to the ten thousand which cannot even make you look favorably on the ninety thousand."

"No, Countess, these are addressed to you."

"To me? By whom?"

"By Monsieur de Voltaire."

"He charged your Majesty to deliver them?"

"Not at all; he sent them directly to your Highness."

"How? without a cover?"

"No; enclosed in a charming letter."

"Ah! I understand; your Majesty has been at work this morning with the postmaster. But read the verses, Sire; read Monsieur de Voltaire's verses."

Louis XV. opened the paper and read: —

"Goddess of pleasure, soft Queen of the Graces,
Why blend with the fêtes which make Paphos to ring,
Foul, threatening suspicions and hideous disgraces?
The fate of a hero, oh! why shouldst thou bring?
Still dear our Ulysses his country shall hold,
The State's mighty bulwark, the monarch's delight;
None wiser in council, in battle more bold, —
And Ilion can tell how resistless his might!

"Fair Venus, thy throne all the gods shall surround,
Thy beauty celestial all tongues shall declare,
The roses of joy in thy path shall abound;
Then calm the rough waters and smile on our prayer.
Ah! why should thy anger burn fiercely and high
'Gainst the hero whom foemen still tremble to meet;
For how can he draw from such beauty a sigh,
Save in breathing his vows as he kneels at her feet?"

"Decidedly, Sire," said the countess, more piqued than gratified by this poetical offering, "Monsieur de Voltaire wishes to recommend himself to your favor."

"He loses his pains, then," said the king. "He is a firebrand who would burn Paris if he returned to it. Let him stay with his friend my cousin Frederick II.; we have enough with M. Rousseau on our hands. But take the verses, Countess, and study them."

She took the paper, made a lighter of it, and laid it beside her plate, the king watching her.

"Some tokay, Sire?" said Chon.

"From the vaults which supply his Majesty the Emperor of Austria," said the countess.

"From the emperor's vaults?" said the king. "*Pardieu!* no one is supplied from them but myself."

"Very true, Sire," said the countess; "I had it from your butler."

"Ah!" said the king, "and you have seduced —"

"No, Sire, I have ordered."

"Well answered, Countess! The king is a fool."

"Will the king take coffee?" asked Chon.

"Oh, certainly!"

"And will his Majesty burn it, as usual?" asked the countess.

"If the lady of the castle permit." The countess rose. "But what are you doing?"

"I am going to wait on you myself, Monseigneur."

"Well," said the king, leaning back in his chair like a man who has made an excellent supper, and whose humors are, therefore, in a happy state of equilibrium, "Well, I see that my best plan is to let you do as you like, Countess."

The countess brought a silver stand, with a little coffee-pot containing the boiling mocha; she then placed before the king a plate on which was a silver cup and a carafe of Bohemian glass, and beside the plate she laid the lighter which she had just folded.

The king, with the profound attention which he always bestowed on this operation, proportioned his sugar, measured his coffee, and having gently poured on it the brandy, so that it swam on the surface, he took the little roll of paper, lighted it at a candle, and communicated the flame to the liquor. Five minutes afterwards he enjoyed his coffee with all the delight of a finished epicure.

The countess looked on till he had finished to the last drop; then she exclaimed, "Oh, Sire, you have burned your coffee with M. de Voltaire's verses! That is a bad omen for the Choiseuls."

"I was wrong," said he, laughing. "You are not a fairy, you are a demon!"

The countess rose. "Does your Majesty wish to know whether the governor has returned?" she said.

"Zamore? Bah! for what purpose?"

"So that you can go to Marly, Sire."

"True," said the king, making a great effort to rouse himself from his comfortable condition. "Well, Countess, let us see! let us see!"

The countess made a sign to Chon, who vanished. The king resumed his deliberations; but, it must be confessed, with very different feelings from those which had before influenced him. Philosophers say that we see things in bright or dark colors according to the state of our stomachs; and as kings have stomachs like other men, — in general, indeed, not so good as other men, but still communicating the sensation of comfort or discomfort to the rest of the body in the same manner, — our king appeared to be in the most charming humor possible.

At the end of about ten steps in the corridor the king noticed a new perfume. A door was opened into a charming room draped with blue satin embroidered with natural flowers, and revealed to view, illumined by a mysterious light, the retreat toward which, for the last two hours, the steps of the enchantress had been directed. "Well, Sire," she said, "it appears that Zamore has not returned, and we are still imprisoned, — unless we leave the château by the windows."

"By means of the bed-clothes?" asked the king.

"Sire," said the countess, with an admirable smile, "let us use, not abuse."

The king opened his arms, laughing, and the countess dropped the pretty rose, which shed its leaves on the carpet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VOLTAIRE AND ROUSSEAU.

At ten o'clock the next morning the king left the blue chamber. His carriage had awaited him in the court-yard since nine o'clock. Zamore, with folded arms, was giving, or pretending to give, orders.

The king, approaching a window, saw all these preparations for departure. "What does this mean, Countess?" said he; "are we not to breakfast? One would think you were going to send me away fasting!"

"Heaven forbid, Sire! but I thought your Majesty had to meet Monsieur de Sartines at Marly."

"*Pardieu!*" said the king, "could not Sartines be told to come here, — it is so near?"

"Your Majesty will do me the honor to believe that that idea had already occurred to me."

"And, besides, the morning is too fine for work; let us breakfast."

"Your Majesty must first give me a few signatures for myself."

"For the Comtesse de Béarn?"

"Yes; and then name the day and the hour."

"What day and hour?"

"The day and hour for my presentation."

"Faith!" said the king, "you have won your presentation, Countess; fix the day yourself."

"Sire, the sooner the better."

"Is all ready?"

"Yes."

"You have learned to make your three reverences?"

"I have practised them for more than a year."

"You have your dress?"

"In twenty-four hours it will be ready."

"And you have your godmother?"

"In an hour she will be here."

"Very well, Countess; come, a bargain."

"What is it?"

"That you will never again speak of that affair of the Vicomte Jean with the Baron de Taverney."

"Must I sacrifice the poor viscount?"

"Yes, faith!"

"Well, Sire, I will speak of it no more. The day?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"The hour?"

"Half-past ten at night, as usual."

"It is settled, Sire?"

"It is settled."

"On your royal word?"

"On the word of a gentleman."

"Give me your hand on it, France!" and Madame Dubarry held out her pretty little hand, in which the king placed his own.

This morning all Luciennes felt the gayety of its master. He had yielded on one point on which he had long before determined to yield; but he had gained another, which was all profit. He would give one hundred thousand livres to Jean, on condition that he should go to lose them at the waters of the Pyrenees or of Auvergne, — that would pass for banishment in the eyes of the Choiseul party. There were louis-d'or that morning for the poor, cakes for the carp, and praises for Boucher's paintings.

Eleven o'clock struck. The countess, although attend-

ing assiduously to the king at his breakfast, could not help looking, from time to time, at the clock, which moved too slowly for her wishes. His Majesty had taken the trouble to say that when the Comtesse de Béarn arrived, she was to be shown into the breakfast-room. The coffee was served, tasted, drunk, — still she did not come. Suddenly the tramping of a horse's feet was heard. The countess ran to a window. It was a messenger from the viscount, who leaped from his horse reeking with foam. At sight of him she felt a chill run through her veins; but it was necessary to hide her uneasiness, in order to keep the king in good humor. She returned to his side and sat down. A moment afterward, Chon entered with a note in her hand. There was no means of escape; it must be read before the king.

"What is that, sweet Chon?" said the king; "a love-letter?"

"Oh, certainly, Sire!"

"From whom?"

"From the poor viscount."

"Are you quite certain?"

"Look at it, Sire."

The king recognized the writing; and thinking the note might contain something about the Lachaussée affair, "Very well," said he, pushing it aside, "very well; that is enough."

The countess was on thorns. "Is the note for me?" she asked.

"Yes, Countess."

"Will your Majesty permit me —"

"Oh, yes! read it, read it; and in the mean time Chon will repeat 'Maître Corbeau' to me." So saying, he pulled her on his knee, and began to sing, — with the falsest voice in the kingdom, according to Rousseau.

The countess retired into the recess of a window, and read the following epistle: —

Do not expect the old wretch; she pretends that she scalded her foot yesterday, and is obliged to keep her room. You may thank Chon's most opportune arrival yesterday for this. The old witch recognized her immediately, and so ends our little comedy.

It was fortunate that that little fool of a Gilbert, who is the cause of this misfortune, cannot be found. I could wring his neck. However, he may be assured it is in store for him if ever he crosses my path.

But to the point; come to Paris at once, or all is lost.

JEAN.

"What is the matter?" inquired the king, surprised at the sudden paleness which overspread the countess's face.

"Nothing, Sire; it is only a bulletin of Jean's health."

"Does not the dear viscount get better, then?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, Sire, much better!" said the countess. "But I hear a carriage enter the courtyard."

"Oh, our old countess, no doubt!"

"No, Sire, it is M. de Sartines."

"Well, what then?" exclaimed the king, seeing that Madame Dubarry was moving toward the door.

"Well, Sire, I shall leave you with him and go to dress."

"And what about the Comtesse de Béarn?"

"When she comes, Sire, I will let your Majesty know," replied the countess, crumbling the viscount's note in the pocket of her dressing-gown.

"Then you abandon me?" said the king, with a melancholy air.

"Sire, remember this is Sunday; you have papers to sign." So saying, she presented her fresh and rosy cheeks to the king, who kissed them, and she left the room.

"Devil take all signatures," said the king, "and those who bring them! Who was it that invented ministers and portfolios?"

He had scarcely finished this malediction, when the minister and the portfolio entered by a door opposite that by which the countess had departed. The king sighed again, more deeply than before.

"Ah! are you there, Sartines?" said he. "How very punctual you are."

This was said in a tone which left it very doubtful whether the words were intended as a eulogium or a reproach. The minister opened his portfolio, and busied himself in taking out and arranging his papers. Just then the sound of the wheels of a carriage was heard, grating on the sand of the avenue.

"Wait a little, Sartines," said the king; and he ran to the window.

"What!" said he, "the countess is driving off?"

"It is she indeed, Sire," said the minister.

"But is she not going to wait for the Comtesse de Béarn?"

"Sire, I am inclined to think she is tired of waiting, and is going to find her."

"Yet the old lady had decided on coming this morning."

"Sire, I am almost certain that she will not come."

"Then you know something about the matter, Sartines?"

"Sire, I am obliged to know a little about everything, otherwise your Majesty would be dissatisfied with me."

"Well, what has happened? Tell me, Sartines."

"To the old countess, Sire?"

"Yes."

"What are always happening, Sire, — difficulties."

"Then the Comtesse de Béarn really will not come?"

"Hum! there was rather more certainty of it last evening than there is this morning."

"Poor countess!" said the king, unable, in spite of himself, to conceal a gleam of satisfaction which sparkled in his eyes.

"Ah, Sire, the quadruple alliance and the family compact were trifles in comparison with this presentation!"

"Poor countess!" repeated the king, shaking his head, "she will never accomplish her purpose."

"I fear it, Sire, unless your Majesty concerns yourself about it."

"She was so certain that now all was in the right train."

"And what makes the matter worse for the countess," said M. de Sartines, "is, that if she is not presented before the arrival of the dauphiness, it is probable she never will be presented at all."

"More than probable! Sartines, you are right. They say that my daughter-in-law is very strict, very devout, very prudish. Poor countess!"

"It will certainly annoy Madame Dubarry very much, Sire, if she is not presented; but it will relieve your Majesty of many annoyances."

"Do you think so, Sartines?"

"Oh yes, Sire! The envious, the libellers, the ballad-mongers, the flatterers, the journalists, will not have so much to say. If she were to be presented, Sire, it would cost us at least one hundred thousand francs for additional police."

"Indeed! Poor countess! and yet she wishes so much to be presented."

"Your Majesty knows you have only to command, and her wishes will be gratified."

"What do you mean, Sartines? Do you imagine that I

could meddle in such an affair? Can I, by signing an order, make people polite to Madame Dubarry? Is it you, Sartines, a man of sense, who advise such an innovation to satisfy the whims of the countess?"

"Oh, by no means, Sire! I merely say, as your Majesty says. 'Poor countess!'"

"Besides," said the king, "her position is not so desperate, after all. You always look at things on the dark side, Sartines. Who can tell whether the Comtesse de Béarn may not change her mind? Who can be certain that the dauphiness will arrive so soon? It will take four days yet before she can reach Compiègne, and in four days much may be done. Let me see. Have you anything for me to do this morning, Sartines?"

"Oh, your Majesty, only three papers to sign!" and the minister of police drew out the first from his portfolio.

"Oh!" said the king, "a *lettre-de-cachet*."

"Yes, Sire."

"And against whom?"

"Your Majesty may see."

"Oh! against the Sieur Rousseau. What Rousseau is that, Sartines, and what has he done?"

"Done, Sire! — written 'Le Contrat Social.'"

"Oh, then! it is Jean-Jacques whom you wish to shut up in the Bastille?"

"Sire, he disturbs the public peace."

"And what the devil would you have him do?"

"Besides, I don't propose to shut him up."

"Of what use is this letter, then?"

"Sire, merely to have a weapon ready."

"It is not that I am at all fond of your philosophers."

"Your Majesty has good cause not to love them."

"But people will exclaim against us. Besides, I think we authorized him to come to Paris."

"No, Sire; we said we should tolerate him on condition that he did not appear in public."

"And does he appear in public?"

"He is always to be seen."

"In his Armenian dress?"

"Oh no, Sire! We ordered him to lay it aside."

"And he obeyed?"

"Yes, but complaining loudly all the time of our persecution."

"And how does he dress now?"

"Oh, like other people, Sire!"

"Then he cannot be so much remarked?"

"What, Sire, a man who has been forbidden to appear in public not remarked! And then do you know where he goes every day?"

"To the Maréchal de Luxembourg's, to Monsieur d'Alembert's, to Madame d'Épinay's?"

"To the Café de la Régence, Sire! He plays chess there every evening. He must be mad upon that point, for he always loses; and it requires every evening a company of soldiers to keep order among the crowds around the house."

"Well," said the king, "the Parisians are even greater fools than I thought them. Let them go on amusing themselves in that way, Sartines; while they do so they will not complain!"

"But, Sire, if some fine day he should take it into his head to make a speech, as he did in London?"

"Oh! in that case, as there would be criminality and public infringement of the laws, you would not require a *lettre-de-cachet*, Sartines."

The minister saw that the king did not wish the arrest of Rousseau to rest on the royal responsibility, so he did not press the matter farther.

"But, Sire," said he, "there is another philosopher."

"Another!" replied the king, languidly, "shall we never have done with them?"

"Ah, Sire, it is they who have never done with us!"

"And who is this one?"

"M. de Voltaire."

"Has he also returned to France?"

"No, Sire; it would be much better, perhaps, if he had, for then we could watch him."

"What has he been doing?"

"It is not he who has been doing anything, it is his partisans; they are actually going to have a statue erected in his honor!"

"Equestrian?"

"No, Sire; and yet I assure you he is a famous captor of towns!"

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Sire, there has been no such man since Poliorcetes," continued Sartines. "He obtains information from all quarters; the highest persons in your kingdom turn smugglers for the sake of his books. I seized, the other day, eight boxes full of them; two were addressed to the Duc de Choiseul."

"It is very amusing!"

"Sire, reflect that they are now doing for him what is done for kings, — they are decreeing him a statue."

"Sartines, statues are not decreed by others to kings, they decree them to themselves. And who is to make this fine work of art?"

"The sculptor Pigale. He has set out for Ferney to make the model. In the mean time subscriptions are pouring in; and observe, Sire, it is only authors who are permitted to subscribe. All come with their offerings; they

make quite a procession every day. Even Rousseau brought his two louis-d'or."

"Well," said the king, "what can I do in the matter? I am not an author; it does not concern me."

"Sire, I thought of proposing to your Majesty to put an end, by royal command, to this demonstration."

"I shall take good care not to do any such thing, Sartines. Instead of decreeing him a bronze statue, they would then decree him one of gold. Let them alone. Faith, he will look even uglier in bronze than in flesh and blood!"

"Then your Majesty desires that the matter should take its own course?"

"Let us understand one another, Sartines. 'Desire' is not the word. I should be very glad to put an end to these things, certainly; but how can I? It is impossible. The time is past when royalty could say to the spirit of philosophy, as God says to the ocean, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther!' To blame loudly but uselessly; to aim a blow, but strike short of our aim, — that would serve only to show our weakness. Let us turn away our eyes, Sartines, and pretend not to see."

The minister sighed. "At least, Sire," said he, "if we do not punish the men, let us suppress their works. Here is a list of books which, in my opinion, should instantly be proscribed. Some attack the throne, some the altar; some teach rebellion, others sacrilege."

The king took the list, and read in a languid voice: "'The Sacred Contagion; or, the Natural History of Superstition.' 'The System of Nature; or, Laws of the Physical and Moral World.' 'Instructions of the Capuchin at Ragusa to Brother Pediculoso on his setting out for the Holy Land.'" He had not read one fourth of the list, when he let it fall, while an expression of sadness and

dejection overspread his usually unmoved countenance. He remained thoughtful, and for some minutes seemed quite overcome. "Sartines," said he at last, "one might as well undertake to move the world. Let others try it."

The minister looked at him with that perfect understanding of his wishes which the king liked in those who approached him, as it saved him the trouble of thinking and acting. "A tranquil life, Sire," said he, "a tranquil life, — is not that what your Majesty wishes?"

The king nodded. "Oh, yes!" said he; "I ask for nothing else from your philosophers, encyclopedists, thaumaturgi, illuminati, poets, economists, journalists, — tribes that come one knows not whence, — that are always bustling, writing, croaking, calumniating, calculating, preaching, complaining. Let them be crowned; let statues be raised to them; let temples be built to them, — but let them leave me in peace."

Sartines arose, bowed, and left the apartment muttering, as he went, "It is fortunate we have on our money, 'Domine salvum fac regem.'"

Then the king, now left to himself, took a pen and wrote to the dauphin the following lines: —

"You have requested me to hasten the arrival of her Royal Highness the Dauphiness, and I wish to gratify you.

"I have ordered that there shall be no stay made at Noyon; consequently, on Tuesday morning she will be at Compiègne.

"I shall be there myself precisely at ten o'clock, — that is to say, a quarter of an hour before her."

"Thus," said he to himself, "I shall get rid of that foolish affair of the presentation, which annoys me more than Voltaire and Rousseau and all the philosophers past, present, and to come. The affair will then be between the poor countess, the dauphin, and dauphiness. Faith! it is *only fair that* young minds, with strength for it, should

contend with these vexations, hatreds, and revenges! Children should early learn to suffer; it is an excellent part of education."

Delighted at having thus got rid of the difficulty, and certain that he would not be reproached with either favoring or hindering this presentation, which was occupying the attention of all Paris, the king entered his carriage and drove off to Marly, where the court was waiting for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHAPERON AND DÉBUTANTE.

THE poor countess — let us continue to apply the epithet which the king had given her, for at this moment she truly deserved it — hastened toward Paris like a soul in torment. Chon, terrified by Jean's paragraph concerning Gilbert, shut herself up in the boudoir at Luciennes to hide her grief and anxiety, lamenting the fatal whim which had induced her to pick up Gilbert on the high-road.

Having reached the outskirts of Paris, the countess found a coach awaiting her. In the coach were Vicomte Jean and a lawyer, with whom he seemed to be arguing in the most energetic manner. The moment he perceived the countess he leaped out, and made a sign to his sister's coachman to stop. "Quick, Countess!" said he. "Quick, get into my carriage and drive to the Rue Saint-Germain des Près!"

"Is the old lady going to give us the slip?" said Madame Dubarry, changing carriages, while the lawyer, on a sign from the viscount, followed her example.

"I fear it, Countess," replied Jean; "I fear she is giving us a Roland for our Oliver."

"But what has happened?"

"You shall hear. I stayed in Paris because I am always suspicious; and in this case I was not wrong, as you will see. At nine last night I went prowling about the inn of the Coq Chantant. All quiet, — no movement, no visitors; *all* looked well. Consequently I thought I might

go home to bed, — and to bed I went. This morning I awoke at break of day. I roused Patrice, and ordered him to go and keep watch at the corner of the street. Well, at nine — observe, that was an hour sooner than I had appointed — I drove up to the hotel. Patrice had seen nothing to cause the least anxiety, so I boldly walked upstairs. At the door of the countess's room a maid-servant stopped me, and told me that the countess could not leave the house to-day, and perhaps not for a week. I confess that although prepared for some rebuff, I was not for that. 'What!' I exclaimed, 'she cannot go out? What is the matter?' 'She is ill.' 'Ill? Impossible! Yesterday she was perfectly well.' 'Yes, Monsieur, but Madame makes her own chocolate; and this morning, when it was boiling, she spilled it over her foot, and she is scalded. On hearing the countess's cries I hastened in, and I found her nearly fainting. I carried her to her bed, and I think she is now asleep.' I was as white as your lace, Countess, and could not help crying out, 'It is a lie!' 'No, my dear Vicomte Dubarry,' replied a sharp voice, which seemed to pierce the very wall, 'it is not a lie; I am in horrible pain.' I rushed forward in the direction whence the voice came, and burst through a glass door which I could not open; the old countess was really in bed. 'Ah, Madame!' I exclaimed, — but it was all I could utter; I was in such a rage. I could have strangled her with pleasure. 'Look there,' said she, pointing to an old kettle which was lying on the floor; 'there is the chocolate-kettle that did all the mischief.' I flew to it, and stamped on it with both feet; it will make no more chocolate, I can answer for it. 'What a misfortune!' cried the old lady, piteously; 'it must be the Baronne d'Alogny who will present your sister. But what can we do? It was so written, as they say in the East.'"

"Heavens, Jean, you drive me to despair!" exclaimed the countess.

"Oh! I do not despair yet, if you go to her; it was for that that I sent for you."

"But why do you not despair?"

"Why? Because you are a woman, and can do what I cannot; you can have the bandage taken off; and if you discover that it is an imposture, you can tell her that her son shall never be anything but a clown, — that she shall never touch a farthing from the estate of the Saluces; in short, you can play off the imprecations of Camilla on her, much better than I the fury of Orestes."

"Is this all a jest?" cried the countess.

"No, I assure you."

"And where does our sybil lodge?"

"At the Coq Chantant, Rue Saint-Germain des Près, in a great black house, with a monstrous cock painted on an iron plate; when the iron creaks, the cock crows."

"I shall have a dreadful scene with her."

"No doubt of it; but you must take your chance. Shall I go with you?"

"No; you would spoil all."

"Just what our lawyer said; I was consulting him on that point when you drove up. For your information, I may tell you that he says to beat a person in his own house renders you liable to fine and imprisonment, while to beat him out of it —"

"Is nothing!" said the countess. "You know that better than any one else."

Jean made a grimace, and smiled significantly.

"Debts," said he, "that are long due gain interest; and if ever I meet my man again —"

"I would much rather, at present, speak of my woman!"

"I have nothing more to tell you; so be off!"

"But where will you wait for me?"

"In the inn itself. I shall ask for a bottle of wine, and if you need help I shall be on hand."

"Drive on, coachman," cried the countess.

"Rue Saint-Germain des Près, at the sign of the Coq Chantant," added the viscount.

In a quarter of an hour the carriage stopped near the Rue Abbatiale. Then Madame Dubarry descended and proceeded on foot. She feared that the noise of the wheels might put the old lady on the alert, — that she might suspect what visitor was coming, and have time to avoid her. Alone, then, she entered the gaping porch of the inn. No one saw her until she was at the foot of the staircase; there she encountered the hostess. "The Comtesse de Béarn?" said she.

"She is very ill, Madame, and cannot see any one."

"Yes, I know; I have come to inquire about her." And, light as a bird, she was at the top of the stairs in a moment.

"Madame, Madame!" cried the hostess, "a lady is forcing her way into your chamber."

"Who is she?" asked the old lady, from a distant part of the room.

"I," said the favorite, appearing on the threshold with a face perfectly suited to the occasion, for she smiled out of compliment, and looked sad by way of condolence.

"You here, Madame?" exclaimed the old lady, turning pale.

"Yes, dear Madame, I have come to express my sympathy for your misfortune, of which I have just heard. I beg you to tell me how this accident happened."

"But, Madame, I dare not ask you to sit down in such a miserable place as this."

"I know, Madame, that you have a castle in Touraine; I can excuse your being obliged to receive your friends here in an inn." And she sat down so determinedly that the old lady saw she must allow her to have her way.

"You seem in great pain, Madame," said the favorite.

"Oh, in dreadful pain!"

"The right leg? But, good heavens, how did you manage to scald it?"

"Nothing more simple; I held the chocolate-kettle in my hand, the handle gave way, and I received the boiling water on my ankle."

"How shocking!"

The old lady sighed. "Yes, shocking indeed," said she; "but it is always so, — misfortunes never come singly."

"You are aware that the king expected you this morning?"

"You increase my despair, Madame."

"His Majesty is not pleased, Madame, that he has failed to see you."

"But the pain I am in will be a sufficient apology; and I trust yet to be able to offer to his Majesty my very humble excuses."

"I do not tell you that to cause you any vexation," said the countess, seeing that the old lady was assuming a little formality, "but merely to let you know that his Majesty felt grateful for the offer you made me."

"You see my condition, Madame."

"Certainly; but may I ask you a question?"

"I shall be honored if you will do so."

"Was not your accident a consequence of your having experienced some sudden agitation?"

"Very possibly," said the old lady, bowing slightly;

"I must acknowledge that I was deeply moved by your gracious reception of me."

"Yes; but there was another thing."

"Another thing? Nothing that I know of, Madame."

"Oh, yes! an unexpected meeting with a person on leaving my house."

"I did not meet any one; I was in your brother's carriage."

"Before getting into the carriage?"

The old lady seemed to be tasking her memory.

"Just as you were going down the stairs to the vestibule."

The old lady seemed to search her memory still more anxiously.

"Yes," said the favorite, smiling, but with some impatience, "some one entered the court as you left my house."

"I am so unfortunate, Madame, as not to be able to remember."

"A lady; now you remember?"

"I am so short-sighted that at a distance of two paces, Madame, I cannot distinguish any one."

"Oh, ho!" said the favorite to herself; "she is too cunning for me, — I shall never succeed in this way. Then, since you did not see the lady," she continued aloud, "I must tell you that she is my sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Dubarry."

"Oh! very well, Madame; but as I have never had the pleasure of seeing her —"

"Yes," interrupted the other, "you have seen her; only when you saw her she called herself Mademoiselle Flageot."

"So," cried the old lady, with a bitterness which she could not suppress, "that pretended Mademoiselle Flageot,

who caused me to undertake the journey to Paris, is your sister-in-law?"

"She is, Madame."

"And who sent her to me?"

"I did."

"To play a trick on me?"

"No, to serve you, while at the same time you should serve me."

The old lady bent her thick gray eyebrows. "I do not think," said she, "her visit will turn out very profitable to me."

"Did the vice-chancellor receive you ill, then, Madame?"

"Empty promises."

"But it seems to me that I offered you something more tangible than empty promises."

"Madame, God disposes, though man proposes."

"Come, Madame, let us view the matter seriously. You have scalded your foot?"

"Scalded it very badly."

"Could you not, in spite of this accident, — painful, no doubt, but, after all, nothing dangerous, — make an effort to bear the journey to Luciennes in my carriage, and stand before his Majesty for one minute?"

"It is quite impossible, Madame! I turn faint at the very thought of getting up."

"Is the injury so very serious?"

"Serious indeed!"

"And who dresses it for you and nurses you?"

"Like all housekeepers, I have excellent receipts for burns, and I dress it myself."

"Might I take the liberty of requesting to see your specific?"

"Oh, yes! it is in that vial on the table."

"*Hypocrite!*" thought the countess, "to carry her dis-

simulation to such a point! She is as cunning as a fox, but I shall match her. Madame," added she, aloud, "I also have an excellent oil for accidents of this kind; but, before applying it, it is necessary to know what kind of scald it is, — whether it is inflamed, or blistered, or the skin is broken."

"Madame, the skin is broken," said the old lady.

"Oh, heavens! how you must suffer. Shall I apply my oil to it?"

"With all my heart, Madame. Have you brought it?"

"No; but I will send for it."

"A thousand thanks!"

"But I ought to ascertain the degree of seriousness."

The old lady cried out. "Oh, no, Madame!" she said; "I could not think of permitting you to see such a sight."

"Delightful! she is caught," thought Madame Dubarry. "Don't be afraid, Madame!" she said aloud; "I am accustomed to the sight of wounds!"

"Oh, Madame, I have too much regard for propriety —"

"When it is a question of serving our fellow-beings, Madame, we must not stand upon etiquette," said Madame Dubarry; and she stretched out her hand toward the old lady's leg, which was extended on the sofa.

Madame de Béarn uttered a scream of pain.

"Very well acted," said Madame Dubarry to herself, watching her every feature distorted with anguish.

"How you frightened me, Madame!" said the old lady. "It is almost death to me to touch it;" and with pale cheeks and half-closed eyes she leaned back, as if nearly fainting.

"Do you allow me to look at it?"

"If you choose, Madame," said the old lady, in a weak and suffering voice.

Madame Dubarry did not lose an instant; she took out

the pins in the bandages, and rapidly unrolled them. To her great surprise she was permitted to go on. "When it comes to the last covering," she thought, "she will scream, and try to prevent me from seeing it; but though she kill herself calling on me to stop, I will see the leg!" and she proceeded in her task.

Madame de Béarn groaned, but offered no resistance.

At last the bandages were untied, the last covering was removed, and a real wound, caused by a scald, lay before Madame Dubarry's eyes. Here ended the old lady's diplomacy; livid and inflamed, the wound spoke for itself. The Comtesse de Béarn might have seen and recognized Chon; but if so, her courage and determination raised her far above Portia and Mutius Scævola. Madame Dubarry gazed at her in silent admiration. The old lady, now somewhat recovered, enjoyed her victory to the utmost; her inflamed eye brooded with satisfaction on the countess kneeling at her feet. Madame Dubarry replaced the bandages with that delicate care which women exercise toward the suffering, placed the limb once more on its cushion, and took her seat beside the couch.

"Come, Madame," said she, "I see of what you are capable, and I beg your pardon for not having begun this subject in the way in which I ought with such a woman as you. Make your own conditions."

The eyes of the old lady sparkled, but it was only for a moment. "In the first place," said she, "state what your wishes are, and then I will see if I can be of any service to you."

"Madame, I wish to be presented at Versailles by you, though it should cost you another hour of the horrible suffering which you have endured this morning."

The Comtesse de Béarn listened impassively. "Anything else, Madame?" said she.

"That is all. Now it is your turn."

"I must have," replied Madame de Béarn, with a decision which showed clearly that she treated with the countess as one power with another, "I must have the two hundred thousand francs of my lawsuit secured to me."

"But if you gain your cause, you will then have been paid four hundred thousand."

"No; for I look on the disputed two hundred thousand as mine already, — the other two hundred thousand I shall reckon as merely an additional piece of good fortune to that of possessing the honor of your acquaintance."

"You shall have them, Madame. What next?"

"I have a son, whom I love tenderly, Madame. Our house has already been distinguished by military genius; but, born to command, we make but indifferent subalterns. My son must have a company immediately, and next year a colonel's commission."

"Who will pay all the necessary expenses, Madame?"

"The king. You perceive that if I expended on my son the sum which I am to receive from you, I should be as poor to-morrow as I am to-day."

"That will make six hundred thousand francs."

"Four hundred thousand, supposing the commission cost two hundred thousand, which is a high estimate."

"Agreed. You shall be satisfied on this point."

"I have now to request from the king restitution of my vineyard in Touraine, containing four acres, which the engineers took from me eleven years ago in making a canal."

"But they paid you for them?"

"Yes, they paid me according to the assessor's valuation; but I value it at just double the sum."

"Well, you shall be paid a second time. Is that all?"

"Excuse me. I am out of cash, as you may suppose, Madame, and I owe Maître Flageot about nine thousand francs."

"Nine thousand francs!"

"Yes; it is absolutely necessary to pay him. Maître Flageot is an excellent lawyer."

"I have not the least doubt of it, Madame. Well, I will pay these nine thousand francs out of my own private purse. I hope you will acknowledge that I am accommodating."

"Oh, you are perfect, Madame! But I think I have also proved that I wish to serve you."

"If you knew how much I regret that you scalded yourself!" replied the favorite, with a smile.

"I do not regret it, Madame, since, in spite of the accident, my devotion to your interests will, I trust, give me strength to be useful to you."

"Let us sum up," said Madame Dubarry.

"Pardon me one moment, — I had forgotten one thing. Alas! it is so long since I have been at court that I have no dress fit for the occasion."

"I foresaw that, Madame, and yesterday, after your departure, I ordered a dress for you. To-morrow, at noon, it will be ready."

"I have no diamonds."

"Bömer and Bossange will give you to-morrow, on my order, a set of ornaments worth two hundred and ten thousand livres, which, the following day, they will take back at two hundred thousand. Thus your indemnity will be paid."

"Very well, Madame; I have nothing more to wish."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"However, about my son's commission?"

"His Majesty will give it to you himself."

"And for the attendant expenses?"

"The order will be given with the commission."

"Very good. We have now only to arrange about the vineyard; there were four acres —"

"How much were they worth?"

"Six thousand francs an acre; it was excellent land."

"I will now subscribe an obligation to pay you twelve thousand francs, which, with the twelve thousand you have already received for the land, will make just twenty-four thousand."

"There is the writing-desk, Madame."

"I shall do myself the honor to hand the desk to you," said Madame Dubarry.

"To me?"

"Yes, that you may write a little letter to his Majesty which I shall dictate, — a fair return, you know."

"Very true," replied the old lady; and arranging her paper and taking a pen, she waited. Madame Dubarry dictated: —

SIRE, — The happiness which I feel on learning that your Majesty has accepted my offer to present my dear friend the Comtesse Dubarry —

The old lady made a grimace, and her pen began to spit.

"You have a bad pen," said the favorite; "you must change it."

"It is unnecessary, Madame; I shall get accustomed to it."

Madame Dubarry continued, —

emboldens me to solicit your Majesty to look on me with a favorable eye when I shall appear at Versailles to-morrow, as you have deigned to permit me to do. I venture to hope, Sire, that I merit your Majesty's favor, inasmuch as I am

allied to a house, every chief of which has shed his blood for the princes of your august race.

"Now sign, if you please," said the favorite.

And the countess signed, —

ANASTASIE EUPHÉMIE RODOLPHE,
COMTESSE DE BÉARN.

The old lady wrote with a firm hand, in great letters half an inch long, and sprinkled her letter with a sufficient number of aristocratic mistakes in orthography. When she had signed, still holding the letter fast with one hand, she passed with the other the paper, pen, and ink to Madame Dubarry, who in a little straight, sharp hand signed an obligation to pay the sums agreed upon.

Madame Dubarry then wrote a letter to Bömer and Bossange, the Crown jewellers, requesting them to give the bearer the set of diamond and emerald ornaments called "Louise," — because they had belonged to the Princess Louise, aunt to the dauphin, who had sold them to obtain funds for her charities. That done, the ladies exchanged their papers.

"Now," said Madame Dubarry, "give me a proof of your friendship, my dear Countess."

"With all my heart, Madame."

"I am sure that if you come to me, Tronchin will cure you in less than three days. Come, then; and you can at the same time try my oil, which is really excellent."

"Well, but do not let me detain you, Madame," said the prudent old lady. "I have some matters to settle here before I can set out."

"Then you refuse me?"

"On the contrary, Madame, I accept, but not for this moment. It is just now striking one by the abbey clock; give me until three, and at five precisely I will be at *Luciennes*."

"Will you permit my brother to come for you with his carriage at three o'clock?"

"Certainly."

"In the mean time take care of yourself."

"Fear nothing, you have my word; and though my death should be the consequence, I will present you to-morrow at Versailles."

"Good-by, then, my dear godmother."

"Good-by, my charming godchild."

And so saying, they parted, the old lady still reclining, with her foot on the cushion and her hand on her papers, Madame Dubarry in better spirits than on her arrival, but certainly rather vexed that she had not been able to make better terms with an old woman from the country, — she who could outwit the king of France when she chose. Passing by the door of the principal salon, she saw Jean, who, doubtless to prevent any one harboring suspicions as to the cause of his long stay, was taking a second bottle of wine. Perceiving his sister, he jumped up from his chair and ran to her.

"Well?" he cried.

"Well, I may say, as Marshal Saxe once said to his Majesty on the battlefield of Fontenoi, 'Sire, learn from this spectacle how dearly a victory may be purchased.'"

"We are victorious, then?"

"There is another saying; but this comes down to us from antiquity: 'One more victory like that, and we are lost.'"

"We have the godmother?"

"Yes; only it costs us about a million."

"Oh, oh!" said Jean, with a frightful grimace.

"Why, I had no chance; I must either take her at that, or give her up."

"But it is abominable!"

"It is as I tell you; and perhaps if you make her angry, she will make us pay double."

"*Pardieu*, what a woman!"

"She is a Roman!"

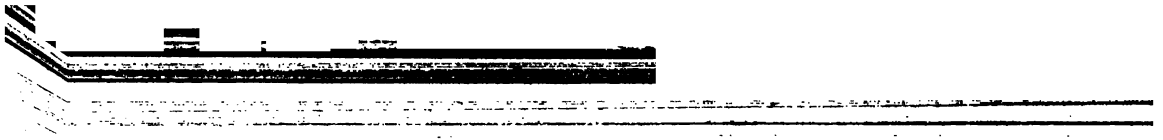
"She is a Greek!"

"Never mind! Greek or Roman, be ready to bring her to Luciennes at three o'clock. I shall never be easy until I have her under lock and key."

"I will not stir from here," said Jean.

"And I, on my side, will hasten to prepare everything," said the countess. She sprang into her carriage. "To Luciennes!" said she. "To-morrow I shall say, 'To Marly!'"

Jean followed the carriage with his eyes. "We cost France a pretty little sum," said he. "It is very flattering for the Dubarrys!"



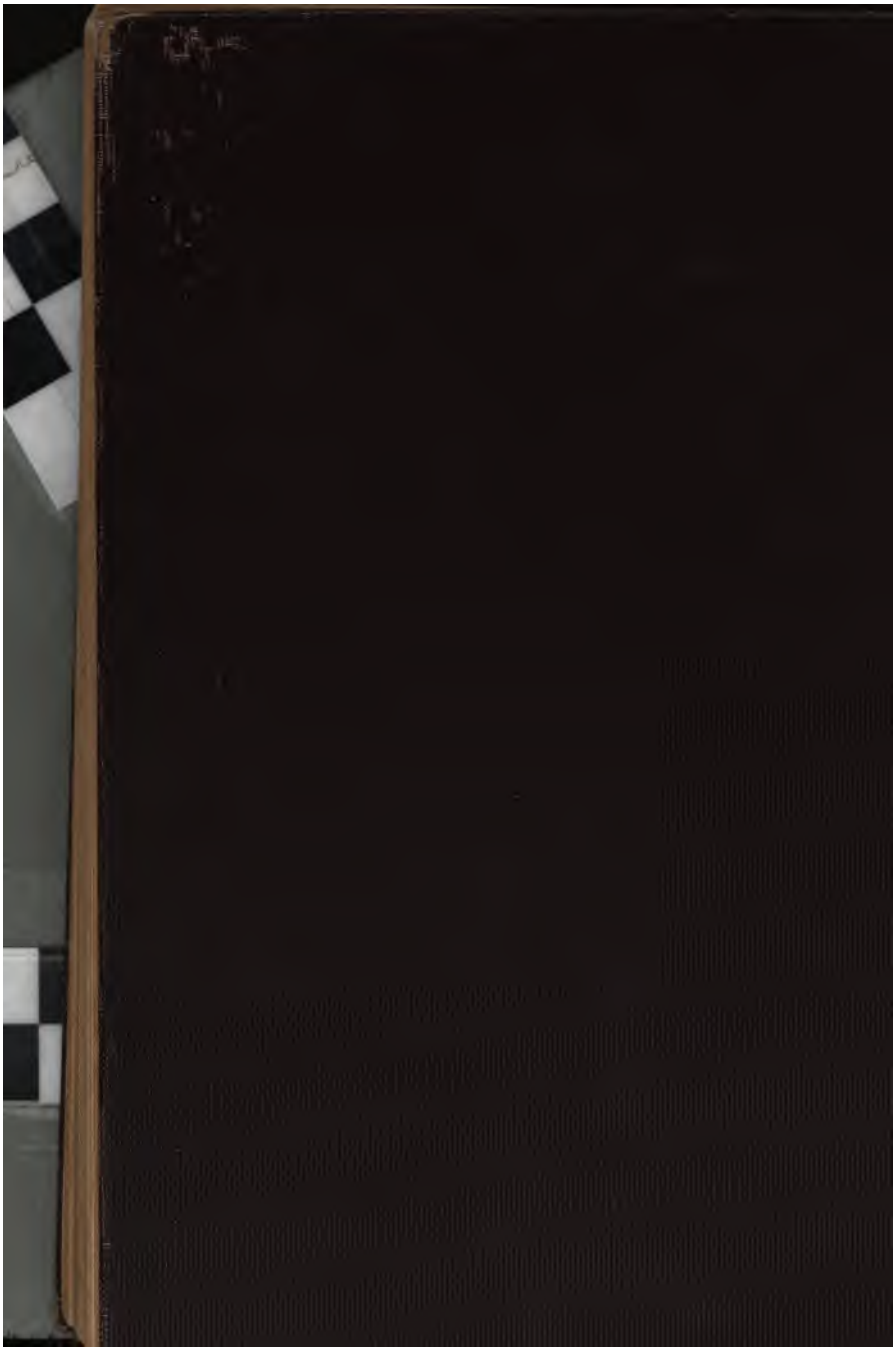
To avoid fine, this book should be returned on
or before the date last stamped below

SEP 3 1949
MAR 3 1950
SPRING 1980
SPRING 1984
JUN 1991

Stanford University Libraries
3 6105 002 487 192

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1493

All books may be recalled after 7 days

DATE DUE

JUN 07 1994
F/S JUN 07 1994